

**Working document after meeting on August 7**

## **Participatory Standards at Society of Professional Journalists events<sup>1</sup>**

The Society of Professional Journalists is committed to a safe and collegial environment for all involved with SPJ events, regardless of format or location. SPJ defends free speech while expecting all participants at SPJ events to treat all others with respect and dignity.

SPJ's standards prohibit behavior that others would reasonably perceive as knowingly harassing or humiliating others. SPJ prohibits discriminatory conduct related to age, race, ethnicity, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, physical ability or appearance, religion, or political ideology.

These standards apply to all events and meetings sponsored by or affiliated with SPJ at the national and regional levels. All participants -- including members, guests, vendors, speakers, elected leaders, committee members and staff -- are expected to follow them.

SPJ leadership may take immediate action to deal with those who do not meet minimal expectations of appropriate behavior. Violators can be immediately dismissed from events, excluded from in-person or online events and activities, and/or forfeit their SPJ membership. This policy establishes a Participation Standards Committee to ensure due process. It can convene when someone's conduct is called into question.

The SPJ's website provides information for how to file a complaint.

### **Complaint process**

If you feel threatened with or in immediate physical jeopardy during an in-person SPJ event, call 911 or contact building security.

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<sup>1</sup> These guidelines are unrelated to SPJ's Code of Ethics, which pertains to journalistic activity. We are grateful to Investigative Reporters & Editors for its language and procedures.

A person can file a complaint by filling out a complaint form on the SPJ.org website. For immediate assistance, you should also alert an SPJ staff member, event organizer, or meeting chair who will have the ability to take immediate action at their discretion. For minor infractions, SPJ's executive director, the event organizer, or meeting chair can issue a warning to the alleged offender, with a promise that they will refrain from such behavior going forward. For more egregious, threatening, or repeated infractions, the executive director, event organizer, or meeting chair has the authority to expel the alleged offender from the SPJ-sponsored conference, event or meeting.

After a formal complaint is filed on the spj.org website, three members of SPJ's Participation Standards Committee (the PSC, as further defined below) will have 3 weeks to review the written complaint on the form as well as written and oral statements provided by the complainant, the accused, and any potential witnesses.

Infractions will be levied after a majority vote of three members of the PSC. Infractions imposed on people found to have harassed or humiliated another person at an SPJ-sponsored event may include:

- 1) **Warning:** A warning may be issued to anyone subject to the standards.
- 2) **Suspension:** A subsequent action by a person who had received a warning, or anyone found to have committed any verbal or physical offense that the PSC finds rises to a more severe level, may be issued a suspension. A suspension prevents them from attending any SPJ national or regional conferences, events, or meetings, participating in any SPJ-affiliated community, and it bars them from running for or serving in any SPJ national or regional elected or volunteer role for 1 full calendar year. The member will not be required to pay dues during the suspension and can retain good standing with SPJ when the suspension ends, as long as they do not commit any further infractions.
- 3) **Expulsion:** In extreme circumstances, SPJ can permanently expel any SPJ member who violates the standards if the PSC feels there is a high likelihood the individual's continued presence in SPJ will cast fear or concern among other attendees. Anyone expelled cannot continue as a member or rejoin SPJ, and will no longer be allowed to attend any SPJ national or regional-sponsored conferences, events, or meetings,

participate in any SPJ-affiliated community, and run for or serve in any SPJ national or regional elected or volunteer role.

**SPJ Participation Standards Committee:** The SPJ Participation Standards Committee (PSC) will meet only after a formal complaint is received through the spj.org website. All committee members will be required to attend one training session annually, which will be held following the annual SPJ Board swearing-in ceremony, and/ or immediately after a member is appointed to the committee. The training session will be held by an attorney representing SPJ or other expert designated by the executive director.

The PSC will be comprised of eight members, that will be tasked with intervening and acting following an alleged infraction; however, only three members (the Three PSC Members) will intervene and act in each case.

SPJ Participation Standards Committee members include SPJ's:

1. Executive Director
2. President or vice president
3. SPJ Regional Coordinator who represents the region in which the accused resides.
4. A board member to be determined by the board at the beginning of each term.
5. Membership Committee Chair
6. Ethics and Standards Committee Chair
7. Diversity and Inclusion Committee Chair
8. Bylaws Committee Chair

The Three PSC Members who will intervene and act after a formal complaint has been filed will be selected based on availability in the order of the members listed above.

The Three PSC Members will have 3 weeks to review the initial complaint, as well as oral and/ or written responses provided by the complainant, the accused, and any potential witnesses. The complainant, the accused and all potential witnesses will have the opportunity to speak directly to the Three PSC Members. The Three PSC Members will vote, and a majority vote (at

least 2 votes) will determine whether an infraction has been committed. If an infraction is found to have occurred, a majority vote (at least 2 votes) will determine what penalty should be assessed. Additional time may be granted to the committee if needed to ensure a fair and thorough investigation, however, timeliness should remain a priority to ensure the safety and well-being of all SPJ members.

## **Appeals Process**

Either the complainant or the accused will have 3 weeks to file a written appeal through the SPJ.org website or sent to the SPJ headquarters following a decision by the SPJ Participation Standards Committee.

The appeal will be reviewed by the remaining members of the PSC who were not involved in the initial decision and were not otherwise recused. The leader of the Appeals Panel is the highest-numbered PSC member not involved in the original decision.

The Appeals Panel will have 3 weeks to review the Three PSC Members' decision, as well as the initial complaint and any evidence provided by the complainant, the accused, and any potential witnesses and vote, by a majority vote, on whether to uphold the Three PSC Member's decision, issue a new decision, institute a different discipline, and/or direct the Three PSC Members to conduct further investigation and issue a new decision. In the event a new decision is issued by the Three PSC Members, either the complainant or the accused will have 3 weeks to file a new written appeal through the SPJ.org website.