



## **AAPOR Policies and Procedures for Transparency Certification August 25, 2017**

### **A. Initial Qualification Procedures**

Survey organizations, including survey subunits of larger organizations (henceforth, organizations), that produce surveys and/or commission, sponsor or report them publicly, are eligible to join AAPOR's Transparency Initiative (TI). The process to do so is as follows:

1. Applicants will complete and submit the Transparency Initiative Certification Agreement, signed by an individual or individuals empowered to commit the organization to the Initiative. The form can be downloaded from AAPOR's TI web page. This agreement is also included as Appendix A to this document. Any organization that is the subject of a current or pending AAPOR complaint may not apply until after that complaint has been resolved.
2. As part of this certification process, applicants will certify that all employees with job responsibilities that include the methodology content of survey reports, press releases and any other forms of survey data disclosure, have been properly trained in TI principles and procedures for compliance. To support organizations in this effort, AAPOR makes available a set of TI online educational modules and other materials.
3. The applicant will appoint a representative or representatives who will coordinate compliance for the organization and be the main point of communication with AAPOR. These representatives will work with the primary reviewer to ensure that the procedures are in place for certification and that the applicant organization is in compliance with the TI's basic disclosure requirements.
4. The applicant organization will provide examples of TI compliant documentation based on two original surveys that will serve as models for future reporting. Where the documentation is deemed to be inadequately transparent, the reviewer will work with the applicant(s) to assist them in making modifications that will bring it into compliance for future reporting. Note that the TI is only concerned with the reporting of original survey

data that is publicly released and not with the reporting of historical survey data that was previously collected and which is being reported for comparative purposes only.

5. Applications will be reviewed as they are received. The review of applications will be the responsibility of the Transparency Initiative Coordinating Committee (TICC), which will appoint two reviewers to study the details of each application and make a recommendation to the TICC, which will then consider confirmation. Where there is disagreement among reviewers, the full TICC will examine the application. TICC reviewers will not include individuals employed by organizations that would be considered direct competitors or to otherwise have a conflict of interest, such as formal or informal affiliation with or recent employment by the applicant organization. If the applicant organization feels that there is a conflict of interest, then they can send a written request to the TICC explaining the conflict and asking that a different reviewer be assigned.

Reviews of applications will typically be completed within four weeks of submission.

7. Once an applicant is certified, the TI coordinating committee will:
  - a. Inform the applicant in writing using a letter signed by the AAPOR President.
  - b. Provide the applicant organization with the TI logo that the organization may display on its website and/or printed documents.
  - c. AAPOR will add the organization's name, its TI representative and website address to the TI section of the AAPOR site.

To maintain certification, the certifying organization will be asked to reconfirm its commitment to the TI on an annual basis by indicating a willingness to continue abiding by the TI's rules and procedures. This will consist of re-signing the Certification Agreement (see Appendix A) every year. In addition, the participating organization will agree to be evaluated by TICC every two years through an inspection of the transparency of a sample of recent studies conducted by the organization. The evaluation will determine whether the organization is in compliance with TI requirements.

## **B. Monitoring and Enforcement Methods**

1. The TICC will oversee the ongoing monitoring and enforcement of the TI.
2. Compliance will consist of several components. The certifying organization will be asked to reconfirm commitment to the TI, on an annual basis, by indicating a willingness to continue abiding by the TI's rules and procedures. This will consist of re-signing the Certification Agreement (see Appendix A) every year. In addition, the participating organization will agree to cooperate in an evaluation, by TICC, of the transparency of a sample of recent studies, conducted at least once every two years, to check for TI compliance.
3. TI certified organizations will receive an annual reminder notice that it is time to renew their certification. This notice will be sent to the organization's representative to the TI. If a participating organization chooses not to renew, they will be instructed to cease use of the logo, and will be deleted from the AAPOR Transparency Initiative's website.
4. The periodic evaluation of TI organizations will be assigned to a monitor by the MC. The monitor will be expected to report any potential conflicts of interest in advance of conducting an assignment. If an applicant organization feels that there is a conflict of interest then they may submit a written request to have a different monitor assigned. The MC will make a final decision on whether any conflicts of interest interfere with the ability of the monitor to carry out an unbiased evaluation.
5. Evaluations will consist of reviewing the applicant's website and two recent surveys (i.e., surveys conducted since last certification or recertification), selected by the monitor to be representative of studies about which the organization releases information. For each survey selected, if relevant, the reviewer will search for and review a publicly available disclosure statement to determine if the organization is in compliance.

A number of survey organizations do not have survey releases posted at a centralized place on their website, and some organizations do not have any survey releases posted at all. For these organizations, the monitor will contact the designated TI compliance representative for the organization and ask for the publicly available documentation from two recent surveys to determine if the organization is in compliance. The representative must provide the documentation for both surveys within 10 business days of the request.

The monitor will provide a written summary of the results of the assessment to the MC. A recommendation will then be forwarded to the TICC. If deficiencies in disclosure exist, the monitor will contact the organization with the results of the assessment, provide recommendations for remediation, and work with the organization to make the necessary corrections to again be in compliance with the Transparency Initiative. Certified organizations that are found to be non-compliant will be given 30 days to correct the deficiencies identified during the evaluation. [An extension of 30 days can be

granted, at the discretion of the TICC, if such a request is deemed reasonable.] If deficiencies are not resolved within the allotted time, an organization will be placed on suspension and asked to remove the TI logo from its website until all deficiencies are corrected and the suspension is lifted. The TICC may also decide to conduct a more extensive review of the organization's public releases (if relevant) over the past 12 months to determine whether the case at hand is an exception rather than part of a broader pattern of failures to disclose.

6. Public complaints about non-compliance will go through the TICC, rather than the AAPOR Standards Committee. Complaints will be investigated and addressed within 30 days. If the complaint is deemed to have merit, the organization will be evaluated as described above. Organizations will be allowed to appeal any decision to the Standards Committee.
7. Organizations suspended from the TI for any reason will be sent a letter notifying them that they are being removed from TI certification, and the organization will be removed from AAPOR's list of TI-certified organizations until such time as the suspension is lifted. AAPOR will also reserve the right to issue a press release stating that an organization has been removed from TI certification if the organization continues to advertise their certification after removal. The organization will not be allowed to re-apply for TI certification for 12 months.
8. Participation in the TI does not provide protection from an AAPOR Standards complaint should one be filed.

## APPENDIX A

### AAPOR Transparency Certification Agreement

#### Overview

A survey organization, or survey subunit of a larger organization, that produces public opinion and survey research and/or commissions/sponsors them and releases them publicly or reports them privately to clients, is transparent when it discloses essential information about its methodology in any such public release of private report to clients.

The AAPOR Code of Professional Ethics and Practices (the “Code”) applies to individuals engaged in public opinion and survey research. AAPOR’s Transparency Initiative (the “TI”) extends the standards of disclosure of the Code (the “Disclosure Standards”), which are subject to amendment from time-to-time, to survey organizations. For public release or private reporting to clients of original public opinion or survey results, conformance with the Disclosure Standards entails making available in such release or report all of the methodological elements identified in the minimum disclosure requirements of the Disclosure Standards.

Organizations that certify to the TI are expected to follow practices that make all relevant items of information from the Code available to clients and to attempt to educate clients regarding the importance of transparency whenever possible (including by referring them to AAPOR’s TI web page). Organizations that certify to the TI are expected to require organizations that collect data on their behalf to follow practices that make all relevant items of information available.

The items below to which the organization is certifying are the minimum reporting standards for organizations wishing to be in compliance with the Transparency Initiative. The organization is encouraged to adhere to the spirit of the Transparency Initiative by also disclosing any additional information that the organization deems relevant to the conduct and interpretation of data from each study it conducts.

#### Certification to the Transparency Initiative

We, the undersigned, hereby certify our agreement to the following disclosure principles, policies and procedures with regard to the public release or to the private reporting to clients of original public opinion and survey results that we release or report after our certification herein to the TI (such research subject to public release or private reporting to clients, the “TI Research”):

- A. We shall provide the following disclosures with regard to TI Research involving surveys by including such disclosures in the specific TI Research or by making them otherwise publicly available, preferably on our web site, immediately upon release of the TI Research:

1. Who sponsored the TI Research and who conducted it. If different from the sponsor, the original sources of funding will also be disclosed.
2. The exact wording and presentation of questions and response options whose results are reported. This includes preceding interviewer or respondent instructions and any preceding questions that might reasonably be expected to influence responses to the reported results.
3. A definition of the population under study and its geographic location.
4. Dates of data collection.
5. A description of the sampling frame(s) and its coverage of the target population, including mention of any segment of the target population that is not covered by the design. This may include, for example, exclusion of Alaska and Hawaii in U.S. surveys; exclusion of specific provinces or rural areas in international surveys; and exclusion of non-panel members in panel surveys. If possible the estimated size of non-covered segments will be provided. If a size estimate cannot be provided, this will be explained. If no frame or list was utilized, this will be indicated.
6. The name of the sample supplier, if the sampling frame and/or the sample itself was provided by a third party.
7. The methods used to recruit the panel or participants, if the sample was drawn from a pre-recruited panel or pool of respondents.
8. A description of the sample design, giving a clear indication of the method by which the respondents were selected, recruited, intercepted or otherwise contacted or encountered, along with any eligibility requirements and/or oversampling. If quotas were used, the variables defining the quotas will be reported. If a within-household selection procedure was used, this will be described. The description of the sampling frame and sample design will include sufficient detail to determine whether the respondents were selected using probability or non-probability methods.
9. Method(s) and mode(s) used to administer the survey (e.g., CATI, CAPI, ACASI, IVR, mail survey, web survey) and the language(s) offered.
10. Sample sizes (by sampling frame if more than one was used) and a discussion of the precision of the findings. For probability samples, the estimates of sampling error will be reported, and the discussion will state whether or not the reported margins of sampling error or statistical analyses have been adjusted for the design effect due to weighting, clustering, or other factors. Disclosure requirements for non-probability samples are different because the precision of estimates from such samples is a model-based measure (rather than the average deviation from the population value over all possible samples). Reports of non-probability samples will only provide measures of precision if they are accompanied by a detailed description of how the underlying model was specified, its assumptions validated and the measure(s) calculated. To avoid confusion, it is best to avoid using the term "margin of error" or "margin of sampling error" in conjunction with non-probability samples.
11. A description of how the weights were calculated, including the variables used and the sources of weighting parameters, if weighted estimates are reported.
12. If the results reported are based on multiple samples or multiple modes, the preceding items will be disclosed for each.

13. Contact for obtaining more information about the study.

B. We shall make the following disclosures with regard to TI Research involving surveys available to the requesting party within 30 days of any request for such disclosures.

1. Procedures for managing the membership, participation, and attrition of the panel, if a pool, panel, or access panel was used.
2. Methods of interviewer training, supervision, and monitoring, if interviewers were used.
3. Details about screening procedures, including any screening for other surveys that would have made sample members ineligible for the current survey must be disclosed (e.g., in the case of online surveys if a router was used).
4. Any relevant stimuli, such as visual or sensory exhibits or show cards. In the case of surveys conducted via self-administered computer- assisted interviewing, providing the relevant screen shot(s) is optimal, though not required.
5. Details of any strategies used to help gain cooperation (e.g., advance contact, compensation or incentives, refusal conversion contacts) whether for participation in a group, panel or access panel or for participation in a particular research project.
6. Procedures undertaken to ensure data quality, if any. Where applicable, this includes re-contacts to confirm that the interview occurred and/or to verify the respondent's identity, measures taken to prevent respondents from completing the same survey more than once, and other quality control procedures (e.g., logic checks and tests for speeding and patterning). If no such efforts were undertaken, this will be disclosed.
7. Summaries of the disposition of study-specific sample records so that response rates for probability samples and participation rates for non- probability samples can be computed. If response or cooperation rates are reported, they will be computed according to AAPOR Standard Definitions. If dispositions cannot be provided, the reason(s) will be disclosed and this will be mentioned as a limitation of the study.
8. The unweighted sample size on which one or more reported subgroup estimates are based.
9. Specifications adequate for replication of indices or statistical modeling included in research reports.
10. If the results reported are based on multiple samples or multiple modes, the preceding items will be disclosed for each.

C. With regard to TI Research conducted using qualitative research methodologies involving descriptive, unstructured data, such as focus groups, in-depth interviews, case studies, narrative research, and ethnography, we shall include the following items in any qualitative research report or make them available immediately upon release of that report.

1. Who sponsored the research and who conducted it. If different from the sponsor, the original sources of funding will also be disclosed.
2. A definition of the population under study and its geographic location.

3. The instrumentation used (e.g., questionnaires, discussion guides), a description of the data collection strategies employed (e.g., focus groups, semi-structured interviews), and the language(s) used.
4. A description of any relevant stimuli, such as visual or sensory exhibits or show cards.
5. Dates of data collection.
6. The physical location of all data collection activities (e.g., subject home, office/workplace, clinic, focus group facility, street corner).
7. A description of subject eligibility (e.g., age or gender requirements) and the procedures employed to screen and recruit research subjects.
8. The number of research subjects, by data collection strategy.
9. Methods of interviewer and/or coder training, supervision, and monitoring, if interviewers or coders were used.
10. Duration of research participation (e.g., length of interviews, focus group sessions).
11. Any compensation/incentives provided to research subjects.
12. Information regarding whether or not data collection included audio or video recordings.
11. If the results reported are based on multiple samples or multiple modes, the preceding items will be disclosed for each.

D. With regard to content analyses, which include the systematic analysis of text, images or other content, which can be qualitative or quantitative and the material to be analyzed can be from any source (e.g., open-ended verbatim responses collected in surveys, newspaper and magazine articles, television and radio broadcasts, politicians' speeches, tweets, or posts on social networking sites), and which can be performed by human coders and/or via automated coding software, we shall include the following items in any content analysis report or make them available immediately upon release of that report.

1. Who sponsored the research and who conducted it. If different from the sponsor, the original sources of funding will also be disclosed.
2. A description of how the content analyzed was collected or obtained. This will include the source(s) used, how much content was analyzed (e.g., number and average length of articles, tweets or blog postings, news broadcasts), dates analyzed, language(s) included, and criteria or decision rules used to include or exclude elements of content.
3. The sampling approach used. If a census of the target population of content was used, that will be explicitly stated.
4. A discussion of any threats or concerns about the validity or quality of the content (e.g., online commentary created by bots, fabricated social media profiles, relevant content missing from the source(s) used) and any steps taken to address them.
5. A description of how the analysis was conducted. This discussion will mention whether coding was done by software or human coders (or both) and whether quantitative or qualitative methods (or both) were used. For analysis using automated coding, this discussion will mention the software and the parameters or decision rules that were used. For analysis using human coding, this discussion will mention the number of coders and any training and instructions provided to them. If a formal coding scheme was used, it will be provided. If no formal coding scheme was used, this will be disclosed.



6. Inter-coder reliability, the amount of text analyzed by multiple coders, processes for resolving inconsistencies, and any steps taken to increase the level of agreement, if multiple coders were used. If only one coder was used, this will be disclosed.
  7. The unit of analysis (e.g., a news article, broadcast, tweet, or blog posting).
  8. A description of how the weights were calculated, including the variables used, if weights were used to develop a coding scheme and/or produce final estimates.
  9. If the results reported are based on multiple samples or multiple modes, the preceding items will be disclosed for each.
  10. Other information that may need to be disclosed if the content analysis involves qualitative data collection (see Section C) or survey data collection (see Sections A & B).
- E. With regard to TI Research, If we did not collect the research data ourselves, we will obtain the disclosure information required herein from our fieldwork subcontractor so that we can make the disclosure required herein in a timely manner and if we act as a fieldwork subcontractor, we will provide the disclosure information required herein to the TI Research's primary contractor or sponsor so that such person can make the disclosure required herein in a timely manner.
- F. Reflecting the fundamental goals of transparency and replicability, we share the expectation that access to datasets and related documentation will be provided to allow for independent review and verification of research claims upon request. Our datasets may be held without release for a period of up to one year after findings are publically released to allow full opportunity for primary analysis. In order to protect the privacy of individual respondents, such datasets will be de-identified to remove variables that can reasonably be expected to identify a respondent. We acknowledge that those who commission publically disseminated research have an obligation to disclose the rationale for why eventual public release or access to the datasets is not possible, if that is the case.
- G. We have internal procedures and process to: (1) educate our staff about the TI requirements, (2) ensure that the required TI disclosure elements are made available on a routine basis for all future survey, qualitative, and content analysis research; and (3) insuring that our organization's compliance within the TI requirements is internally monitored on a regular basis.
- H. All of our employees with job responsibilities that include the methodology content of TI Research, press releases and any other forms of research data disclosure, have been properly trained in TI principles and procedures for compliance.
- I. We shall fully cooperate with (1) periodic evaluations of our TI compliance that may be conducted by AAPOR, and (2) any formal investigations of complaints that we are not in compliance with the TI requirements to which we are certifying above.
- J. We shall adhere to the Code to the extent that amendments to the Code impose new Disclosure or other obligations with regard to research organizations for new TI Research.
- K. We hereby agree to AAPOR's Terms and Conditions for TI Certification.

I hereby certify that I am authorized to make the foregoing certification on behalf of my organization.

Organization Name:

Name and Title:

Signature:

Date: