

Transparency Initiative Coordinating Committee (TICC) December 2015 Report

The TICC met on December 2. Most of the meeting focused on the important issue of the extent to which Transparency Initiative members are responsible for clarifying information regarding surveys they conduct for clients in the event that the client publicly releases survey findings without fully disclosing all TI-required elements. This discussion was prompted by a complaint from a long-standing AAPOR member regarding the failure of a specific media firm to disclose key methodological information that is required of TI members. Since in this case the research firm that conducted the survey (a TI member) did not directly release the results, they did not participate in providing the content, including a methodology statement that should have provided the required disclosure elements. The complainant offered that this represented a “loophole” in the TI requirements. Concern over this issue has prompted discussion across several meetings of our committee, and was the main focus of the December meeting.

The most definitive method of addressing this concern would be a revision to the AAPOR Transparency Certification Agreement to require that TI members agree to disclose any TI disclosure elements that clients do not disclose when reporting findings. Whether or not to recommend doing so (to AAPOR’s Council) was discussed. Some of the points made by TICC members included the following:

- It was observed that there are other organizations covering our industry that do require at least some action by their members when transparency elements are not disclosed. Some firms who are members of the TI are also members of these organizations, which include CASRO, NCPP, WAPOR and ESOMAR.
- Concern was expressed that we probably do not want to do anything that would be interpreted as an attempt to “police” clients. However, the AAPOR Code currently does require members to police clients with regard to misrepresentations and/or distortions reported. But, there is no such requirement for failure to provide disclosure of TI required information. The Committee believed we should not go beyond the Code to make disclosure by clients mandatory.
- There was also concern that doing so would not be enforceable.
- Some committee members indicated this issue was their organization’s primary concern when making their initial decision as to whether or not to join the Transparency Initiative and their organizations would likely discontinue participation if this requirement was added to the TI agreement.
- It was also felt that compelling TI members to provide TI-required disclosure information when clients do not was not merely closing a “loophole” but rather an intrusion on business relationships, which constitutes policing clients regarding transparency. The Committee does not want to do that.
- Indeed, we also discussed the fact that the goal of the TI was to be a positive focus on education and the rewarding of good behavior.
- The point was also made that cases in which a TI client refused to reveal disclosure elements could be brought as a complaint to the Standards Committee, which has a mechanism for investigating issues such as this.
- In the end, the majority of TICC members agreed that adding this new requirement would “do more harm than good.”
- At the same time, all TICC members agreed that they supported the idea and spirit of encouraging all TI member clients to fully comply with our disclosure requirements when

reporting survey findings, even if we are reluctant to extend the TI's rules to those clients. It was also agreed that having a careful discussion of this issue was overdue and important.

- There was also a consensus that we should:
 - Plan to develop new educational materials that directly focus on this issue, and
 - Add a clause about clearly communicating these expectations to clients into our Transparency Certification Agreement. Tim Johnson and Dave Lambert will take the lead in proposing this revision to the Agreement and hopefully obtain full TICC support in time to present this to the AAPOR Council during their January meeting.