

Transparency Initiative of AAPOR – Goals, Standards and Practices

Brief summary of work in progress / version May 14, 2011

Over the past 12 months, a steering committee of the AAPOR council has been working to develop the standards and procedures to implement a Transparency Initiative (TI). This process is ongoing. The Steering Committee tasked with the TI created an advisory committee of volunteers from among the 60+ survey organizations that expressed a willingness to participate in the TI. This advisory group has been consulted frequently and has provided indispensable advice. Here is a brief summary of the work to date, along with the key questions yet to be resolved. The goal is to have the TI up and working primary to the start of the presidential primaries, even if it is not fully developed.

Goal. The ultimate goal of the Transparency Initiative is to advance the science and reputation of survey research by facilitating routine disclosure of methodological information from participating survey organizations. AAPOR puts its reputation behind participating survey organizations. We declare that TI participants are open in the way they conduct their research, and we honor them for this practice.

Standards. Membership in the TI entails a commitment to the principles and practices of the TI, specifically an organizational pledge to conform to the AAPOR Code of Professional Ethics and Practices regarding disclosure, Section III. When undertaking work for a private client, the same essential information should be made available to the client when the client is provided with the results.

Eligibility. Membership is open to any survey organization or consultant, whether individuals within the organization are AAPOR members or not.

Structure. The TI will be administered by an ad-hoc committee (the “TI coordinating committee”) that reports to the Standards committee. The AAPOR president will appoint the chair of the coordinating committee, who will appoint additional committee members from the AAPOR membership. The TI coordinating committee will be responsible for recruiting, reviewing and qualifying new members of the TI, working with the Education and Communications and Membership & Chapter Relations committees for outreach and education efforts, for the ongoing maintenance of the TI section of the AAPOR website and for monitoring and compliance reviews.

Qualification. The TI will employ a process similar to the [Safe Harbor program](#) run by the US Department of Commerce to qualify TI members, monitor compliance, and deal with possible non-compliance. Prospective members will prepare and submit a formal disclosure process document or policy statement specifying the organization’s procedures for complying with the TI disclosure standards. Prospective members will submit at least two examples of recent disclosure statements for publicly released studies (or reports to clients) that have been designed to conform to the TI. Prospective members must appoint a liaison to the TI, who will coordinate compliance for the organization and serve as the point of communication between AAPOR and the member. Members will annually reconfirm their commitment to the. An organization will be required to submit a full application packet only once.

Compliance will be monitored by periodic compliance checks and by the public at large. The periodic check will involve a review of the member’s website or other public documents to identify public releases made over a designated period. TI committee members will perform these reviews.

Education and Communications. The TI is a critical element of AAPOR’s mission to educate its members, the wider survey research community and the consumers of survey research. Accordingly, the TI should be thought of as an ongoing means for educating members and survey organizations in how to be transparent regarding their methods. It is also a vehicle for ongoing educational efforts for journalists and other consumers of our research.

Critical unresolved issues. How standardized should methodological statements be? Are there elements in addition to those in the AAPOR code that should be disclosed (e.g., demographic or partisan composition of samples). Will there be an archive of disclosed information? If so, how will it work, and when and how frequently must TI members deposit disclosed information in it? How will compliance monitoring work? How frequently should or can reviews occur and not unduly burden the TI committee? What is the proper balance between the higher credibility that would stem from very high disclosure standards vs. the broader impact that would come from widespread participation?