

Why and how to write a useful “code of conduct” for planetary conferences and mission teams

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In recent years, an increasing number of conferences/meetings and teams have added a “Code of Conduct” as part of their policy documents, containing guidance and/or expectations for member/attendee behavior [1-2]. Generally, these statements are written with an aim to foster a more inclusive and accessible environment by protecting the physical, mental, and emotional safety of all participants. This shift towards including consideration of the general culture (and how that culture is affected by social norms of and power dynamics between participants) within team or event planning became a bit more formalized for the planetary science community in May 2019, when the NASA Science Mission Directorate Director, Dr. Thomas Zurbuchen, introduced a requirement that all SMD-funded conferences have a Code of Conduct [3-5, Box 1].

Box 1. “Everyone related to NASA science, including awardees associated with this program element, should report harassment claims in accordance with the NASA Policy Statement on Antidiscrimination in NASA Conducted or Funded Program, Activities, and Institutions signed by Administrator Bridenstine ...”

“An event’s diversity and inclusion policies and practices should make clear that everyone is welcome within NASA Science and strive to create an environment that is free of harassment and discrimination.

Organizers of events must have a specific policy, code of conduct or meeting ground rules provided in advance and available during the event for all participants. In the proposal include a brief overview of the meeting conduct principles or policies and identify a responsible person(s).”

-- Quoted from ROSES-2020 “Topical Workshops, Symposia, and Conferences” E.2, Section 4.6 [5], with **emphasis** added.

What makes a useful Code of Conduct?

While many examples of Codes of Conduct (or anti-harassment statements or other policy statements of this sort) for conferences or meetings can be found online [e.g., 6-15] and the overarching messages are usually along consistent lines (e.g., “we seek to create a safe and productive environment for participants”), the written policies vary in what further information they include [16], in how they ask participants to commit to following the policy, and in how policy information is advertised. However, these factors greatly impact the efficacy of such a policy.

Furthermore, discussions by this presentation’s co-authors with members of the planetary science community demonstrate that our community lacks a common understanding about what a Code of Conduct is, what problem it aims to address, and how such a policy can or should be enforced – all of which are important considerations for making a useful Code of Conduct.

Now, as more meetings move to include or have only virtual attendance, it is again important to consider how such an environment can be made inclusive and accessible for all attendees. For example, while provision of inclusive and accessible facilities (e.g., gender neutral bathrooms) would be unnecessary, it still is important that presentations (and presenter backdrops) do not involve offensive materials, and different consideration is needed with respect to how people interact when fewer cues such as facial expressions are available.

However, contributions and engagement within a mission team can be as important for an individual’s career growth as conference presentations and discussions – and thus an inclusive and accessible environment within the teams is just as important. While most planetary mission teams have formal policies about data sharing and publication authorship, authors of this presentation presently know of only one mission team with a Code of Conduct that provides guidance for behavior at Mission Team/Project Science Group meetings and general interactions [17].

With this presentation, we aim to

- Highlight some of the ways in which existing Codes of Conduct are written and advertised. At this time, the majority of information we have is from conferences as that information is publically accessible.
- Add to discussion within the Planetary Science community about what makes a useful code of conduct, so as to begin to normalize expectations and content.
- Encourage discussions that consider all of the common settings where scientists interact (e.g., conferences and mission teams, in-person or virtual meetings). While it is unlikely that one Code of Conduct will suite all purposes, **all policies should address a few needed elements** (Box 2).

Box 2. “Basic Structure of a Code of Conduct: A Code of Conduct is a policy statement issued by an organization containing information about expected behaviors by participants. To be considered an adequate code of conduct, it must have four complete parts:

- statement of unacceptable behavior
- how the policy will be enforced
- how and whom to make an incident report to
- training and reference materials for organizers, staff, and volunteers on how to respond to incident reports.”

-- Quoted from [6].

Table 1. This is based on analysis done in 2018 by [16] – updated to 2020 and with orange columns and rows added.		Code of conduct contains specific language concerning								Where found on last (2019 or 2020) meeting page?	Request for commitment?
		Race	Women	Gender (incl. non-binary)	Sexual orientation	Disability	Intersection -ality	Resources for reporting a violation	Disciplinary action for violation		
Org	Meeting/Doc.	(yes / no)						(absent / poor / good / comprehensive)		e.g., on main page or separate EDI page?	e.g., require explicit agreement upon registration
American Astronomical Society (AAS) [9]	AAS, DDA ^a , DPS ^b , SPD ^c	y	y	y	y	y	n	comprehensive	comprehensive	Linked from “Conference Policies” page	Explicit agreement with registration
American Geophysical Union (AGU) [10]	AGU Fall Meeting, AbSciCon	y	y	n	y	y	n	comprehensive	comprehensive	Linked from homepage under “Resources”	Not known at this time.
Geological Society of America (GSA) [11]	GSA Annual Meeting	y	y	y	y	y	n	comprehensive	good	Not obviously linked from the 2020 meeting page	Explicit agreement with registration
International Astronomical Union (IAU) [12]	Scientific Meetings	y	y	y	y	y	n	poor	good	Linked on the home page, under “IAU Code of Conduct”	Explicit agreement with all organizers, meeting leaders; implicit from attendees
Lunar and Planetary Institute (LPI)	LPSC ^d [13]	y	y	n	y	y	n	poor	absent	Anti-harassment on home page; other info on “Diversity and Inclusion” page	Explicit agreement with LPI anti-harassment statement with registration
	9th Mars Conf. [14]	n	n	n	n	n	n	comprehensive	poor	Linked on home page, under “Conference Policy”	
Space Science in Context (a stand-alone, fully virtual conference) [15]		y	y	y	y	y	n	comprehensive	comprehensive	Linked on home page, under “Conference Policy”	Explicit agreement with registration
Europa Clipper Mission [17]	Rules of the Road	n	n	n	n	n	n	good	good	First section of “Rules of the Road”	Implicit agreement with all team members and affiliates, including students

a: Division on Dynamical Astronomy. b: Division for Planetary Sciences. c: Solar Physics Division. d: Lunar and Planetary Science Conference

References [1] Baker, 2015, ChronicleVita, <https://chroniclevita.com/news/1182-should-academic-conferences-have-codes-of-conduct>. [2] Schneider et al., 14 March 2018, AGI [Geoscience Currents 125](https://www.spaceref.com/news/viewstory.html?pid=52506). [3] Email from Zurbuchen, 17 May 2019, <http://www.spaceref.com/news/viewstory.html?pid=52506>. [4] Zurbuchen, 5 June 2019, National Colloquium, recorded presentation (slide 99). [5] ROSES-2020 “Topical Workshops, Symposia, and Conferences” E.2. [6] <https://www.ashedryden.com/blog/codes-of-conduct-101-faq#coc101whatis> (dated 10 Feb 2014; accessed Dec. 2019). [7] An example “template” Code of Conduct: <https://confcodeofconduct.com/>. [8] A wide collection of Code of Conduct policies: <https://indieweb.org/code-of-conduct-examples>. [9] AAS Code of Ethics, <https://aas.org/ethics> (dated 11 Oct 2017; accessed Mar. 2020). [10] AGU Code of Conduct: <https://www.agu.org/Plan-for-a-Meeting/AGUMeetings/Meetings-Resources/Meetings-code-of-conduct> (accessed Mar. 2020). [11] Promoting Respectful Inclusive Scientific Events (RISE) – Code of Conduct for GSA meetings: <https://www.geosociety.org/GSA/Events/EventConductCode/GSA/Events/Conduct-intro.aspx> (accessed Mar. 2020). [12] IAU Rules and Guidelines for IAU Scientific Meetings (dated 11 Dec 2018) <https://www.iau.org/science/meetings/rules/>. [13] LPSC statement on harassment: <https://www.hou.usra.edu/meetings/lpsc2020/>. [14] Guidance for Attendees at the Ninth International Conference on Mars: <https://www.hou.usra.edu/meetings/ninthmars2019/policies/>. [15] Space Science in Context, Conference Policy/Code of Conduct, <https://spacescienceincontext.wordpress.com/conference-policy/>. [16] Tai Udovicic et al., 2019, Women in Space 2019 Conference, [Abstract](https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/planetary-science-and-astrobiology-decadal-survey-2023-2032). [17] Europa Clipper Mission Rules of the Road, February 2020, v8.2. [18] <https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/planetary-science-and-astrobiology-decadal-survey-2023-2032>.

Next Steps

We aim to compile a white paper on this topic for submission to the NASEM Planetary Science Decadal Survey [18]. **In addition to outlining the present state of these types of policies in how conference or team organizers can generate a more effective Code of Conduct, this white paper will share initial recommendations for continuing to improve our community culture and practices.** All such efforts within our community are important as they will impact the planetary science workforce’s future composition and productivity.

If you are interested in contributing, please contact Serina Diniega. In particular, we would appreciate help with analysis of planetary missions’ “Rules of the Road” documents.