



The Afghan-American Community Organization (AACO) strives to build a supportive, empowered, and engaged Afghan-American community. We believe the diversity of the Afghan-American community is a tremendous asset, and we hope to create a welcoming space that celebrates that diversity and encourages authenticity. Part of creating this space includes addressing [discrimination](#), [harassment](#), and abuse within the community. These struggles are not unique to Afghan-Americans, but we hope to find culturally-informed solutions.

Our experience has shown us that this platform comes with a responsibility to ensure that we maintain a just, inclusive, and welcoming community. Much of this work has come in the form of dialogues and conversations that have highlighted issues and experiences that have alienated people from their community. This will be an ongoing effort that we hope to build, grow, and learn more from.

CODE OF CONDUCT

AACO endeavors to maintain a community that is free of both harassment and bias/discrimination. This document defines these behaviors and offers a framework for responding to members of the community should those expectations be breached. AACO takes all reports very seriously and encourages anyone who believes they have been the target of such misconduct to promptly report any incidents.

The AACO Code of Conduct is applicable to all Board of Directors, Committee Members, volunteers, speakers, facilitators, vendors, and participants of digital, virtual and physical AACO events and forums (referred to as Events), including but not limited to the annual Afghan-American Conference (AAC), Gala, AACConnect platform, regional events (e.g Kick-Off Party, Reunions, Night of Giving, etc.), virtual events, and social media platforms. Reports regarding incidents outside of AACO events and platforms will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Reports involving AACO leadership (Board of Directors, Committee, Conduct Coordinators, Advisors) will be heard regardless of where the incident took place.

All members of the AACO Board of Directors, AACO Committee, and additional leadership teams will be required to complete annual trainings related to the Code of Conduct.

AACO's Code of Conduct is adapted from Code for America's [Code of Conduct](#) and Anti-Harassment Policy and Center DC's [Safe\(r\) Space Policy](#).

As an organization, we recognize that not every situation or interpersonal conflict rises to the level of harassment or discrimination, even though it may not align with our shared [norms](#). Every member of our community is responsible for upholding our shared norms, and we encourage you to engage other community members in open dialogue if you observe norms being broken.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

As an organization and individuals, in our conduct process we aim to:

- Acknowledge and validate individuals who come forward with reports and center their consent and participation in the reporting process
- Recognize that people can both cause harm and be harmed
- Respect privacy and create opportunities for dialogue, where welcomed
- De-emphasize a framework of guilt and innocence in considering conduct, and move towards a model of accountability and repair
- Enact consequences and provide opportunities for individuals who have caused harm to learn and change and provide opportunities for individuals who have experienced harm to reconcile and forgive
- Learn as an organization how we can do better to prevent the conditions that allow for misconduct to occur
- Create spaces for the community where such misconduct is acknowledged, discouraged, and sought to be better understood

REPORTING & REVIEW PROCESS FOR CODE OF CONDUCT VIOLATIONS

1. **Reach out** if you think something has happened that breaks the Code of Conduct, causes you harm, or puts other community members at risk; email safespace@aa-co.org to schedule a time to talk with one of our [Conduct Coordinators](#).
 - a. If you think any member of the Code of Conduct team may be biased in this process, you are entitled to request they be removed from your report. More information can be found [here](#).
2. **Intake:** One of our Conduct Coordinators will schedule an intake conversation with you to talk about what happened and what you'd like to see happen next. If the issue involves any member of [AACO leadership](#), or of the [Code of Conduct Committees](#), those individuals will be removed from the rest of the process.
3. **Review:** Conduct Coordinators will anonymize your report and gather additional information as needed, which may include conversations with other parties involved. If the incident did not take place at an AACO event, Conduct Coordinators will determine if the report is heard.
 - a. Interim Measure(s): If Conduct Coordinators determine that an immediate interim measure is necessary, with approval from the

Executive Director, they will notify impacted parties of that decision. Interim measures will range and may include immediate removal from events. Interim measures should not be considered final decisions or solutions on a report, and therefore cannot be appealed.

- b. The nature of the report will determine the reviewing body. The [Conduct Committee](#) will review reports that involve members of the AACO leadership team, acts of violence, or actions that lead to removal from events. Conduct Coordinators will review all other reports.
 - c. The reviewing body (Conduct Coordinators or Conduct Committee) will design some possible restorative options — including but not limited to private mediation, third-party facilitation, community conversations, refunds for past events, negotiating space usage, or ongoing education.
4. **You decide:** The Conduct Coordinators will review the possible next steps with you and you can decide whether the process moves forward, what happens next, and how involved you are.
 5. **Enact:** Based on your decision, the AACO team will follow through on the plan that's decided.
 6. **Evaluate and Adjust:** Within an agreed-upon time of enacting the plan of action, Conduct Coordinators will follow up with all parties involved to assess the plan, and make any changes to support ongoing safety in the community.

APPEALS PROCESS

Either party (the individual accused of a Code of Conduct violation and/or the accuser) has the option to appeal the final resolution determined by the Conduct Coordinator(s). However, an accused party's right to appeal is revoked if they do not abide by the final resolution during the course of the appeal process.

A party interested in appealing should provide their appeal in writing (via email) to the Appeals Committee within 60 days of being notified of the determined violation and sanctions. The written appeal should include all that apply:

- Evidence that there was an error in process or procedure;
- Evidence of additional or missing information that was not available during the time of the investigation;
- Evidence of bias behavior on behalf of the Conduct Coordinator(s) and/or members of the Appeals Committee; and
- Evidence that the solution is arbitrary or unreasonable given the facts of the case.

Such appeals will be reviewed by the Appeals Committee, who then may elect to hear the appeal. The decision on the part of the Appeals Committee to hear the appeal is not guaranteed and will be based on the reasoning and argument provided in the written appeal.

The Appeals Committee will inform the Conduct Coordinator(s) that an appeal has been made and ask the Conduct Coordinator(s) to provide recorded reports that pertain to the appeal at hand and additional recorded reports of past Code of Conduct violations on one or both parties.

To appeal to the Appeals Committee, email at appeal@aa-co.org.

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

CONDUCT COORDINATORS

To ensure that people are comfortable reporting violations, three Conduct Coordinators are available to receive complaints. They are selected by interview process for one-year terms, which automatically renew if they are in good standing. Conduct Coordinators are responsible for reviewing reports of misconduct from members of the AACO community, developing training and resources on conduct and restoration for the organization, and occasionally guiding and facilitating repair between members of the community. They are entrusted with maintaining confidentiality of reports and operate independently of the rest of AACO Leadership.

CONDUCT COMMITTEE

Seven members will be identified at the start of every year to form the larger Conduct Committee. This body will include one Board Member, the AACO Executive Director, and four subject matter experts identified by the Conduct Coordinators, with one seat kept open for a rotating Conduct Coordinator to participate. There is no limit on the length of each Conduct Committee member's term, and their participation will be approved by an annual vote of the Board of Directors.

The Conduct Committee will be consulted on cases that involve a certain threshold of severity, including but not limited to physical and/or sexual violence, removal from AACO events, and reports of actions of any member of the Board of Directors, AACO Committee Members, or volunteers. A quorum of five Conduct Committee members is needed to review and provide potential solutions to a report.

APPEALS COMMITTEE

Three members of [AACO Leadership](#) will be identified at the start of every year to formulate the Appeals Committee.

Conduct Coordinators or members of the Conduct Committee or Appeals Committee who may be biased due to their relationship with either or both parties involved

should recuse themselves from the process. Either party can also request that the designated Conduct Coordinator or specific members of the Conduct Committee or Appeals Committee be removed from the review process if there is reasonable belief they might be biased. To request the designated Conduct Coordinator(s) or specific members of the Appeals Committee be removed from the review process, see the section on the [Request for Removals](#).

DEFINITIONS

WHAT IS DISCRIMINATION?

Discrimination refers to the unequal treatment of individuals based on race, ethnicity, creed, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, national origin, age, genetics, ability, or any other [protected characteristic](#).

Discrimination might look like:

- Overlooking or rejecting someone for opportunities because of an identity they hold
- A pattern of treating others with less courtesy or respect because of their identity

WHAT IS HARASSMENT?

Harassment refers to words or behavior that threatens, intimidates, or demeans a person. Harassment is not always sexual in nature and can include:

Verbal/Written Conduct

- Offensive comments related to gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, immigration status, mental illness, neuro(a)typicality, physical appearance, body size, race, ethnicity, religion, or any other protected characteristics
- Unwelcome comments regarding a person's lifestyle choices and practices
- Deliberate misgendering or use of "dead" or rejected names
- Deliberate "outing" of any aspect of a person's identity without their consent
- Threats of violence
- Incitement of violence towards any individual, including encouraging a person to engage in self-harm
- Pattern of unwelcome social contact, such as requesting or assuming inappropriate levels of intimacy with others

Physical Conduct

- Physical violence
- Physical intimidation, including striking, shoving, or kicking items, or

intentional blocking of normal movement of another person

Other Conduct

- Deliberate intimidation
- Stalking or following
- Harassing photography or recording, including logging of online activity
- Publication of private communication without anonymization or permission

Conduct that could be considered sexual harassment includes but is not limited to: unwelcome sexual advances, propositions, flirtations, invitations — whether physical, verbal, written, electronic, or telephonic. Anyone can be a victim of harassment, regardless of their sex or gender and the sex or gender of the harasser. Examples of conduct or behavior which constitutes sexual harassment include, but are not limited to:

Physical Contact

- Coerced and/or unwelcome physical contact including but not limited to patting, pinching, stroking, kissing, hugging, fondling, or inappropriate touching
- Certain kinds of physical violence, including assault and sexual assault

Verbal/Written Conduct

- Slurs or derogatory comments
- Unwanted sexual or otherwise provocative comments, stories and jokes and/or discussion or inquiries about one's own or someone else's sexual activities
- Unwanted sexual advances
- Repeated and unwanted social invitations for dates or physical intimacy
- Insults based on the sex of the target
- Sending sexually explicit messages (by text or by email)
- Sexual images or behavior in spaces where they aren't appropriate

Other Conduct

- Threats and demands to submit to sexual requests and creating a threatening or intimidating environment.
- Displaying, distributing, posting, or sharing of sexually explicit or suggestive material
- Sexually-suggestive gestures
- Whistling/Catcalling
- Leering

REQUEST TO REMOVE MEMBERS FROM REVIEW PROCESS

Conduct Coordinators, Conduct Committee members, or Appeals Committee members who may be biased due to their relationship with either or both parties involved should recuse themselves from the process. Either party can also request that specific Conduct Coordinators or members of the Conduct Committee or Appeals Committee be removed from the review process. Recusal will only be granted by the Chair of the Board of Directors if there is significant evidence that decision-making will be significantly biased.

To request someone be removed from the review process, please contact the Chair of the Board. The Reporting Party should request recusal during their initial reach out. The person identified in the possible violation should request recusal as soon as they are notified of the potential violation.