

The Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies would like to acknowledge both the Bunurong/Boon Wurrung, and Wurundjeri people as the Traditional Custodians of the Lands on which we are located in Melbourne. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We also acknowledge the Aboriginal language groups across all of Victoria, whose lands we provide funding for specific projects around Early Childhood Education. We acknowledge their history, their people, and their stories. As an Association we will work together for reconciliation, a process that starts with the acknowledgement of true Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures of Australia and will always value the contribution to our community and culture, the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their families, communities and their stories.

Code of Conduct

1. Introduction

The AGECS Council aims to ensure that Council members, committee members, contractors, and ambassadors are aware of their obligation to comply with this policy to ensure they act professionally and ethically at all times and in all communications, engage in professional and courteous relationships and are aware of their obligation to comply with this policy and to maintain confidentiality regarding discussions, processes and decision making as representatives of AGECS.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide Council members, committee members, contractors, and ambassadors with a framework for appropriate behaviour at AGECS. It is not intended to cover all issues, but rather to provide a compliance guideline that can be used to address professional and ethical issues that may arise.

The Code of Conduct is based on the Strategic Theme and Values of AGECS and incorporates a Working Together Agreement and Virtual Meeting guidelines.

3. Scope

This policy applies to the Council members, committee members, contractors, and ambassadors of AGECS.

4. Code of Conduct

It is expected that Council members, committee members, contractors, and ambassadors are diligent, impartial, courteous, conscientious, and respectful in the performance and delivery of their duties and obligations.

In the performance of duties ensure Council members, committee members, contractors, and ambassadors will:

- a) Comply with all legislative and industrial obligations and policies and procedures of AGECS and where applicable the Early Childhood Sector Codes of Conduct and Standards (for example, ECA Code of Ethics, VIT Code of Conduct and Child Safe Standards);
- b) Comply with Equal Employment Opportunity and Occupational Health and Safety obligations and legislation;
- c) Maintain adequate documents and program records to support decisions made;
- d) Treat all persons with courtesy and sensitivity and provide support and assistance;
- e) Strive to avoid waste and extravagance in the use of resources;
- f) Comply with the Privacy Act 1988;
- g) Not disclose to any person any confidential or official information relating to AGECS or participants in AGECS programs, including Council meeting agenda items, discussions, or plans;
- h) Not harass or discriminate against members in work practices or in the provision of education/programs or refuse support on the grounds of gender, pregnancy, race (including colour, ethnic background, or national identity), marital status, disability, sexual orientation, political or religious belief, or age, or any protected attribute;
- i) Act responsibly when aware of any unethical behaviour or wrongdoing by any person associated with AGECS;
- j) Refrain from making disparaging remarks about other people;
- k) Say nothing said about any person, in any meeting, that if repeated would cause offence;
- l) Take responsibility for behaviours that may have inadvertently impacted on others;
- m) Carry out duties safely and refrain from any conduct including alcohol or substance abuse or misuse that would adversely affect your performance;
- n) Act with integrity with respect to electronic communication and all social media and online platforms;
- o) Not take improper advantage of any confidential or official information relating to AGECS or participants in AGECS programs; and
- p) Must refrain from behaviours that will exploit their position through personal gain.

5. Annual Declaration

All Council members, committee members, contractors, and ambassadors are required to sign and return a copy of the Code of Conduct on engagement and annually on appointment renewal (refer to Appendix One: Code of Conduct Agreement).

6. Breaches of the Code of Conduct

Any breach of the Code of Conduct may be considered misconduct and could result in disciplinary action.

Working Together Agreement (WTA)

1. Purpose

The purpose of this agreement is to help Council members, AGECS committee members, contractors, and ambassadors to work effectively together.

2. Why do we need a WTA?

To have unity around professional conduct, set expectations, ensure accountability, to be aware of and understand boundaries, acknowledge, and respect differences, so people feel comfortable to communicate, challenge, engage and enjoy work; ensures AGECS provides a supportive and professional environment, promotes positive relationships, to identify and develop culture, to recognise that people have individual skills and experience, for consistency and flexibility.

3. How do we want to communicate with one another?

Listen to others before responding, challenge respectfully, be tolerant, and do not talk over the top of others. Contribute ideas at meetings. Be conscious of how loud we talk. Use 'rounds' at meetings to ensure everyone has an opportunity to contribute to discussions.

4. How do we conduct ourselves and work together?

Work as a collaborative team, sharing the workload, providing support, advice and guidance if needed, giving opportunities for debriefing, setting up working groups and subcommittees as deemed necessary.

5. What else is important in the way we work together?

Get to know each member's skills, experiences and strengths and use these to serve the AGECS community. Engage in professional conversations, sharing of relevant and insightful information and learning. Respect each other at all times.

6. How will we use the WTA?

Refer to WTA when issues arise to remind ourselves of the commitments we have made. Practice these commitments every time we are together both virtually and in person:

7. Responsibilities and Expectations

AGECS Council Members, AGECS committee members, contractors, and ambassadors will ensure they;

- a) Attend meetings regularly.
- b) Read documentation prior to the meeting: agenda, minutes, reports.
- c) Put devices on silent (if a call is expected during then it is courteous to let the Chair know that you might step out to take it. Put the phone on silent and when it vibrates remove yourself silently if you have to answer the call).
- d) Once a decision has been adopted by the Council or committee, members must publicly support Council or committee decisions, whether originally in favour or not.
- e) Consistently demonstrate discretion, confidentiality, unity, and responsibility.

8. Unwanted behaviours

- a) Regularly making excuses for missing meetings or being late, not being prepared, losing temper, etc.

- b) Being preoccupied with personal interests and perspectives rather than an AGECS wide perspective.
- c) Not listening or communicating effectively with others.
- d) Dealing poorly with conflict by acting out emotionally (anger, frustration, crying, threatening, accusing, blaming, etc.).
- e) Acting differently outside the meeting than inside (e.g., speak against Council or committee decisions and strategies in the community).
- f) Becoming easily stressed by the small things and being unable to see the bigger picture.

9. Role of a Meeting Chair

The meeting Chair manages the meeting but does not make decisions. The Chair guides and leads discussions on the agenda, balancing the amount of discussion on each item against the time allotted for the meeting.

10. Cultural Competency

The aim of AGECS is to ensure diverse and inclusive representation which will require Council, AGECS committee members, contractors, and ambassadors to practice cultural competency including being aware that:

- Diverse cultures have different perceptions of time and how we use time.
- Diverse cultures have differing family grouping and varying importance of extended family.
- Difference in approaches to difficult conversations/issues – direct vs indirect – forthright vs sensitive.
- To be culturally aware we need curiosity, intuition, and empathy. Cultural intelligence is not about perfection, it is about making mistakes and learning from them.
- We celebrate each other's differences.

Virtual Meeting Guidelines

1. Purpose

The purpose of these guidelines is to help Council members, AGECS committee members, contractors, and ambassadors to conduct virtual meetings while upholding professional standards in order to protect the integrity of AGECS and to manage risk.

2. Responsibility

AGECS will be required to:

- a) Set up virtual meetings with passwords and waiting rooms to ensure online security and privacy;
- b) Arrange for the Engagement Coordinator, Program Manager, or experienced Council members to be present in virtual meetings to troubleshoot issues or any difficulties participants' experience to ensure the smooth running of the meetings.

- c) AGECS reserves the right to record meetings. A notification will advise that the recording is in progress and participants must consent to being recorded.

Participants will be required to:

- a) Ensure they are positioned in a suitable space where confidentiality is managed and maintained – i.e., where others in the participant’s personal space cannot overhear the meeting discussion or view meeting content.
- b) Ensure the background visible to other participants is suitable for a professional meeting and does not include any confidential material or inappropriate visuals.
- c) Wear headphones if others are within the vicinity and privacy cannot be maintained.
- d) Join the virtual meeting five minutes prior to meeting start time.
- e) If, for unforeseen circumstances, a participant joins late, then they are asked to join quietly, without disruption to proceedings.
- f) Close out, prior to the meeting, all email, internet browsers and documents which do not relate to the meeting.
- g) Ensure they have read relevant documentation (e.g., agenda, previous minutes, reports) prior to the start of the meeting.
- h) Have relevant reports open.
- i) Be present visually.
- j) Use the ‘thumbs up’ symbol or visually raise their hand when wishing to make a verbal contribution – the Chair will then invite the participant to speak.
- k) Unmute their speaker when called on by Chair, then mute self again.
- l) Speak concisely and to the point.

Participants must not:

- a) Record the meeting in any format (e.g., on personal devices in audio format or by screenshot).
- b) Download and save material presented during the meeting unless approved to do so by Council.

Meeting etiquette:

- a) Having a drink and/or snack with you is acceptable.

3. Compliance with these guidelines

If it is found that a Council member, AGECS committee member, contractor, or ambassador has failed to comply with the guidelines including ensuring confidentiality and professional standards during or after virtual meetings, the Council may take action as per the Constitution and Conflict of Interest Policy.

If a person suspects that a Council member AGECS committee member, contractor, or ambassador has failed to uphold professional standards during and after virtual meetings, they must notify Council via the President.

Appendix One: Code of Conduct Agreement

The Code of Conduct is based on the Strategic Theme and Values of AGECS and incorporates a Working Together Agreement and Virtual Meeting guidelines. It is expected that Council members, committee members, contractors, and ambassadors agree to maintaining this policy and high professional standards at all times.

I have received a copy of the Code of Conduct and I agree to;

- Comply to the themes, values, policies, and procedures of AGECS
- Be diligent, impartial, courteous, conscientious, and respectful in the performance and delivery of my duties and obligations.
- Act professionally and ethically in all communications and interactions.
- Engage in professional and courteous relationships.
- Ensure awareness of my obligation to maintain confidentiality regarding discussions, processes and decision making as representatives of AGECS.
- Work to the best of my ability to fulfill my obligations to AGECS.
- Act in a manner that is consistent with AGECS standards.
- Ensure the safety and wellbeing of all AGECS stakeholders.

Position: _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

For questions about this policy please contact the President.

Version	3	Approved by Council on	2 nd December 2023
Responsible person	The President	Scheduled review date	December 2026