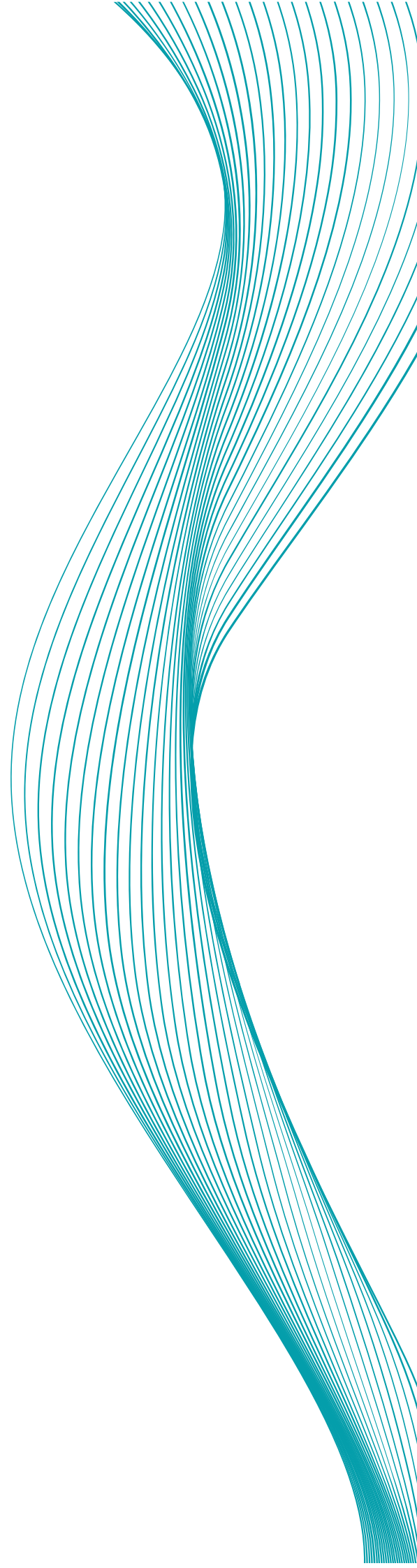




THE PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION OF
SRI LANKA

CODE OF ETHICS

VERSION 1 JULY 2025



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Purpose

Public relations is a strategic management function dedicated to building relationships between organisations and their publics through the delivery of accurate, trusted, and ethical communication.

This Code of Ethics (“the Code”) has been developed by the Public Relations Association of Sri Lanka (PRASL) (“the Association”) for voluntary adoption by members in their individual capacities and by extension, the corporate entities they work for and represent. It seeks to fulfil one of the Association’s principal objectives, namely “to develop and maintain an ethical, professional, and valued PR Industry.” The PRASL recognises that the absence of an officially mandated Code of Ethics for Sri Lanka’s PR industry has resulted in multifaceted ethical challenges. This Code offers a framework for ethical compliance in the practice of public relations in Sri Lanka, balancing universal principles with locally relevant imperatives.

It aims to protect and guide practitioners (whether those practitioners work in corporate or agency settings) while fostering professionalism, transparency, and trust in all stakeholder relationships. The Code is built around key domains of interaction where ethical clarity is essential, addresses the concerns of multiple stakeholder groups including those represented in its tiers of membership, as well as provides a form of protection against the pressures sometimes brought to bear on practitioners of PR to violate ethical practices in pursuit of specific outcomes.

For greater clarity and in recognition of the different aspects of ethics that this Code contains, it comprises several sections, covering different key stakeholder groups and the interactions between them.

1. PR Practitioners

1.1 INFORMATION INTEGRITY & ACCURACY

Practitioners must communicate with honesty, accuracy, transparency, and responsibility. Deliberate falsehoods, omissions that are material to the topic, or manipulations of facts are unethical and undermine public trust.

Practitioners have a responsibility to counsel clients and/or the corporate entities they work for and represent, to collaborate with media partners to prevent the dissemination of any form of content, whether paid or otherwise, that is false, misleading, defamatory, or intended to unfairly discredit competitors. Such practices not only violate ethical norms but also risk legal consequences and damage to reputations.

1.2 CONFIDENTIALITY

Information obtained in confidence must not be used for personal advantage or disclosed without proper authorisation. Practitioners are expected to safeguard sensitive information entrusted to them while complying with regulatory requirements pertaining to disclosure.

1.3 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Practitioners must avoid real, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest. Any such situations must be disclosed promptly to all relevant parties in order to maintain transparency and trust.

1.4 ETHICAL USE OF AI AND DIGITAL TOOLS

Practitioners must not use AI-generated content (e.g., artwork, audio, images, or text) to deceive or mislead. All AI-generated outputs should be clearly identified as such. Such content should not be presented as factual depictions of real people, events, or places unless clearly disclosed. Human oversight must be exercised to verify accuracy, mitigate bias, and ensure compliance with intellectual property and privacy standards. These guidelines emphasise the need for transparency, accuracy, and human oversight in AI-generated content.

This Code is aligned with the ethical principles set out in the IPRA Guidelines on Artificial Intelligence in Public Relations. Practitioners are strongly encouraged to remain informed of the latest updates to these guidelines, given the dynamic and evolving nature of the field.

1.5 RESPECT FOR IPR

Practitioners must respect intellectual property rights (IPR) in all forms of communication and ensure they desist from plagiarism.

1.6 ANTI-BRIBERY AND INDUCEMENT

Practitioners must not offer or accept bribes or improper inducements in the pursuit of desired outcomes for clients or to meet employer targets. Gifts may only be exchanged with professional contacts if they are nominal, legal, infrequent, and cannot be perceived to compromise ethical judgment. Practitioners should familiarise themselves with and adhere to their organisation's as well as their clients' policies on gifts and hospitality. When in doubt, it is advisable to consult with a supervisor in order to ensure compliance.

1.7 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Practitioners must commit to continuous learning and uphold standards that elevate the profession and its credibility in Sri Lanka. Staying informed about emerging trends and ethical practices is essential.

1.8 RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY & HUMAN DIGNITY

All communications must reflect respect for human rights, cultural sensitivity, and diversity of opinion and identity. Practitioners should promote inclusivity and avoid content that could be discriminatory or offensive.

2. The Practitioner – Client Relationship

2.1 BEST INTERESTS OF CLIENT

Practitioners shall act in their client's best interests, while ensuring ethical boundaries are respected.

2.2 OBJECTIVITY & INDEPENDENCE

Professional counsel must be based on objective analysis, not influenced by personal gain or third-party pressures.

2.3 DISCLOSURE

Practitioners must disclose all material affiliations, sponsorships, or financial interests that may affect any advice or representation.

2.4 NO DUAL COMPENSATION

Practitioners must not accept undisclosed payments or benefits from multiple parties for the same engagement.

2.5 ETHICAL REPRESENTATION

Practitioners should avoid representing clients whose demands would compromise the principles of this Code.

2.6 NAVIGATING CLIENT PRESSURE

Practitioners must counsel clients or employers against unethical attempts to manipulate media coverage, including demands for disguised paid content, fake testimonials, misrepresentation of facts, engaging in smear campaigns, or suppression of negative coverage. Practitioners must uphold ethical standards and resist client pressure. In such cases, they are encouraged to seek guidance from senior trusted colleagues in order to navigate these challenges effectively. Upholding ethical standards must take precedence over appeasing client demands and is a professional obligation, even in the face of pressure.

2.7 USE OF THIRD-PARTY ENDORSEMENTS OR INFLUENCERS

Clients must be advised that influencers or third-party endorsers must disclose material connections (e.g., paid partnerships), in line with emerging global and local digital marketing guidelines.

2.8 POLITICAL AND STATE-LINKED CLIENTS

Practitioners must exercise heightened diligence when representing political figures, government institutions, or state-linked entities, ensuring communications are factual, fair, and not propaganda-driven. Prior to entering an engagement with political or state-linked clients, practitioners should adopt the practice of completing and retaining a signed risk declaration form confirming the nature and scope of the engagement, identified reputational, legal, or ethical risks, and commitment to maintaining transparency.

3. The Agency – Agency (or Practitioner – Practitioner) Relationship

3.1 FAIR COMPETITION

Practitioners shall promote healthy, respectful competition and refrain from undermining peers through misrepresentation, defamation, or poaching. Practitioners shall not solicit another practitioner's client through deceptive or unethical means.

3.2 INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Ideas, documents, or proposals shared in good faith must not be used or passed off without appropriate credit or permission.

3.3 SUPPORT FOR ETHICAL PRACTICE

Practitioners should counsel peers in upholding this Code and call out unethical behaviour when observed.

3.4 PITCH ETHICS

Practitioners must avoid soliciting detailed proposals from competitors without genuine intent, or using such material without consent in other proposals. Ethical tendering and pitch practices are essential. Practitioners must not pay commissions or offer percentage-based incentives to secure contracts, as this practice undermines trust and encourages unfair competition.

4. The Practitioner – Media Relationship

4.1 RESPECT FOR EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE AND JOURNALISTIC INTEGRITY

Practitioners must respect the independence, autonomy, and editorial judgement of media professionals. No practitioner shall attempt to coerce, intimidate, or unduly pressure a media outlet or journalist into publishing, suppressing, or altering content.

While collaboration is encouraged, practitioners must respect the independence of the media and refrain from attempting to control editorial output.

4.2 TRANSPARENCY AND AVOIDANCE OF MEDIA MANIPULATION

Practitioners must not pressure, deceive, or incentivise media personnel into publishing false or misleading information, misrepresent facts, or withhold material information that could potentially mislead media professionals.

Practitioners must always present accurate, honest information to media professionals, without concealment of facts that can reasonably be deemed material, and promptly correct any errors.

4.3 AUTHENTICITY IN MEDIA CONTENT

All content provided to the media, including press releases, quotes, images, and videos must be truthful, accurate, and not misleading. AI-generated visuals, synthetic media, or conceptual illustrations may not be presented as depictions of real people, places, or events unless clearly labelled as such.

4.4 ETHICAL GIFTING AND HOSPITALITY

Practitioners may extend token gifts or hospitality to media professionals in the context of events or launches, provided such gestures are reasonable, infrequent, and not intended to influence coverage. Lavish or excessive gifts or incentives are unethical and must be avoided.

4.5 CLEAR DISTINCTION BETWEEN PAID AND EARNED MEDIA

Practitioners should advocate for transparency by ensuring a clear and honest distinction between paid content (such as advertorials, sponsored content, native advertising) and earned editorial coverage. While recognising that labelling practices are ultimately determined by media outlets and clients, practitioners have a responsibility to counsel stakeholders on the importance of disclosure.

Some acceptable practices include: label paid content, leverage built-in features of social media platforms designed for disclosure (example "Paid partnership with" tag), inform clients about local and international regulations mandating disclosure of paid promotions, and establish agency-wide policies covering disclosure of paid content.

4.6 PROHIBITION OF PAYMENT FOR COVERAGE

Offering or soliciting payment, material benefit, or any inducement to secure editorial coverage is unethical and strictly prohibited. All media coverage must be obtained on merit, newsworthiness, and relevance.

5. Other Stakeholders

5.1 FAIRNESS TO ALL

Practitioners must engage with stakeholders – vendors, event organisers, government officials, NGOs, and communities – in a fair, respectful, and ethical manner.

5.2 PUBLIC INTEREST

Public relations activities must not jeopardise public trust or safety. Upholding the public interest is paramount.

5.3 DATA PRIVACY

Practitioners must safeguard personal data and proprietary information in accordance with national legislation and industry best practices.

5.4 REPRESENTATION IN CRISES OR SENSITIVE CAMPAIGNS

When representing clients in high-impact sectors (e.g., health, environment, religion, or ethnic communities), practitioners must engage with affected groups transparently, avoid tokenism, and be sensitive to Sri Lanka's multicultural, multi-religious context.

5.5 INFLUENCER MARKETING & DIGITAL CREATORS

When collaborating with digital influencers or key opinion leaders (KOLs), practitioners must ensure ethical disclosure of partnerships, respect for consumer rights, and the prevention of misinformation. Particular diligence is required during national emergencies or elections.

6. General Compliance

6.1 SCOPE

This Code applies to PR practitioners, whether in agency, in-house, freelance, or consultancy roles. It does not extend to the media as it is outside the governance scope of PRASL.

6.2 VOLUNTARY BUT BINDING

Though voluntary, this Code represents a commitment to uphold the highest standards of professional practice. Violations may lead to review by the PRASL Ethics Committee.

Members who formally pledge to the Code may display a PRASL-issued trust mark—such as “I follow the PRASL Code of Ethics”, “Ethics-Committed PR Practitioner”, or “Proud Signatory to the PRASL Code”. This badge is not a certification of compliance, but a visible declaration of intent, reinforcing professional integrity and public accountability. While not enforceable by law, repeated or serious breaches may prompt review of a practitioner’s use of the trust mark by PRASL.

6.3 PROTECTION FOR WHISTLEBLOWERS

Practitioners who raise ethical concerns internally or externally must be protected from retaliation. A culture of speaking up must be encouraged within both agencies and in-house teams. Reporting must take place in accordance with the whistleblower protection procedures and related policies of the respective company or agency.

6.4 SELF-REGULATION IN ABSENCE OF LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

In the absence of comprehensive statutory frameworks regulating PR in Sri Lanka, practitioners must adhere to this Code as a self-imposed ethical benchmark and advocate for greater accountability in the industry.

6.5 ETHICS EDUCATION AND TRAINING

All PRASL member organisations are encouraged to conduct periodic ethics training and workshops, particularly on emerging areas such as AI, influencer relations, and misinformation.

6.6 UPDATES & INTERPRETATION

The Code will be reviewed periodically by the PRASL Board to ensure its continued relevance to the Sri Lankan PR Industry and its alignment with the principles outlined in the Code of Conduct of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), the foremost global body representing PR professionals.

