

# COPE Sanctions Policy

## Background

The COPE Complaints process was established in 2010 [revised in 2014] as a means of providing independent guidance to our member editors and publishers on disputed matters of publication ethics. While the members of the Complaints subcommittee have worked tirelessly to provide advice and to assist in resolving complaints brought to the subcommittee's attention, often those efforts have been frustrated by a number of issues, one of which is the absence of any defined enforcement mechanism. (See [here](#) for more information on the newly constituted [Facilitation and Integrity subcommittee](#)). Consequently, the Trustee Board have defined an organizational position and policy concerning sanctions against members who demonstrate major or consistent deviations from the principles of publication ethics agreed to when applying for and receiving COPE membership.

### Reference

#### Version 1

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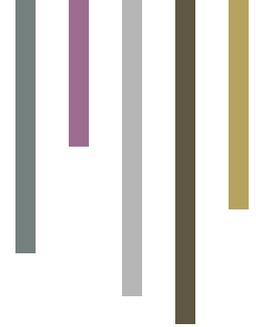
## When would COPE instigate possible sanctions?

Sanctions would be instigated when a member's actions—or non-actions—are found to demonstrate a flagrant or consistent unwillingness to abide by COPE principles. *NOTE: part of COPE's mission is to educate publishers and editors about publication ethics, and hence removal of a member means that COPE no longer has any leverage or impact on that member's behaviour. Consequently, COPE anticipates that sanctions would be used as a last resort in responding to egregious behaviour by members, and only after failed remediation attempts.*

## Process leading to possible sanctions.

Identification of the events which might trigger a sanction against a COPE member can come from different sources, either inside or outside of the COPE membership, and will follow the process outlined below:

1. The Facilitation & Integrity subcommittee will consider making a recommendation for a sanction based on the following criteria:
  - a. The member shows resistance to correcting identified problems that violate COPE principles of publication ethics. (<https://publicationethics.org/core-practices>).
  - b. The member repeatedly acts in unethical ways.
  - c. The member refuses or fails to engage with COPE to remediate ethical issues.
2. If the Facilitation & Integrity subcommittee believe that the member falls within one of the criteria above, they will refer the case to the [Trustee Board](#) with a summary of the case and their recommendation of a sanction, as per the following template.



3. The Trustee Board will make the final decision on the need and level of sanctions. If the Trustee Board cannot reach a unilateral decision, a vote will be taken requiring a majority decision. The Trustee Board may consult the COPE attorney about the legal ramifications of any action.
4. The decision will be communicated to the involved parties and COPE Council in writing.

## Possible actions

Sanctions could include the following and will usually occur in the following sequence, although COPE reserves the right to depart from these guidelines as it deems appropriate:

- Private, written notification to both journal and publisher that the member has failed to comply with COPE principles, and a summary of the issues identified, actions requested and potential next steps.
- Membership placed on probation for a set period of time with continued remediation.
- Membership revoked after remediation attempts have been unsuccessful and the journal removed from the COPE website. NOTE: Members may reapply to COPE after a defined period of sanction. Application would require a COPE audit similar to that applied to new COPE membership applications, and the member would need to demonstrate how concerning issues have been addressed.

All actions will remain confidential within the COPE organization until it is ascertained what level of sanctions might be imposed.

## Note:

- No individual COPE Council member may make a unilateral decision about sanctions.
- Sanctions require the Trustee Board's unilateral agreement or a majority vote for action.
- Individuals outside of COPE Council cannot suggest or impose a COPE sanction.

This is COPE's first sanctions policy. COPE will review how the policy works in practice in November 2018.