

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. To address these issues, the Complaints subcommittee has been replaced by the [Facilitation & Integrity subcommittee](#), and the Trustee Board have defined an organisational position and policy concerning sanctions against members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.

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.

1. The Facilitation & Integrity subcommittee will consider referring the member to the Trustee Board 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.

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 organisation until it is ascertained what level of sanctions might be imposed.

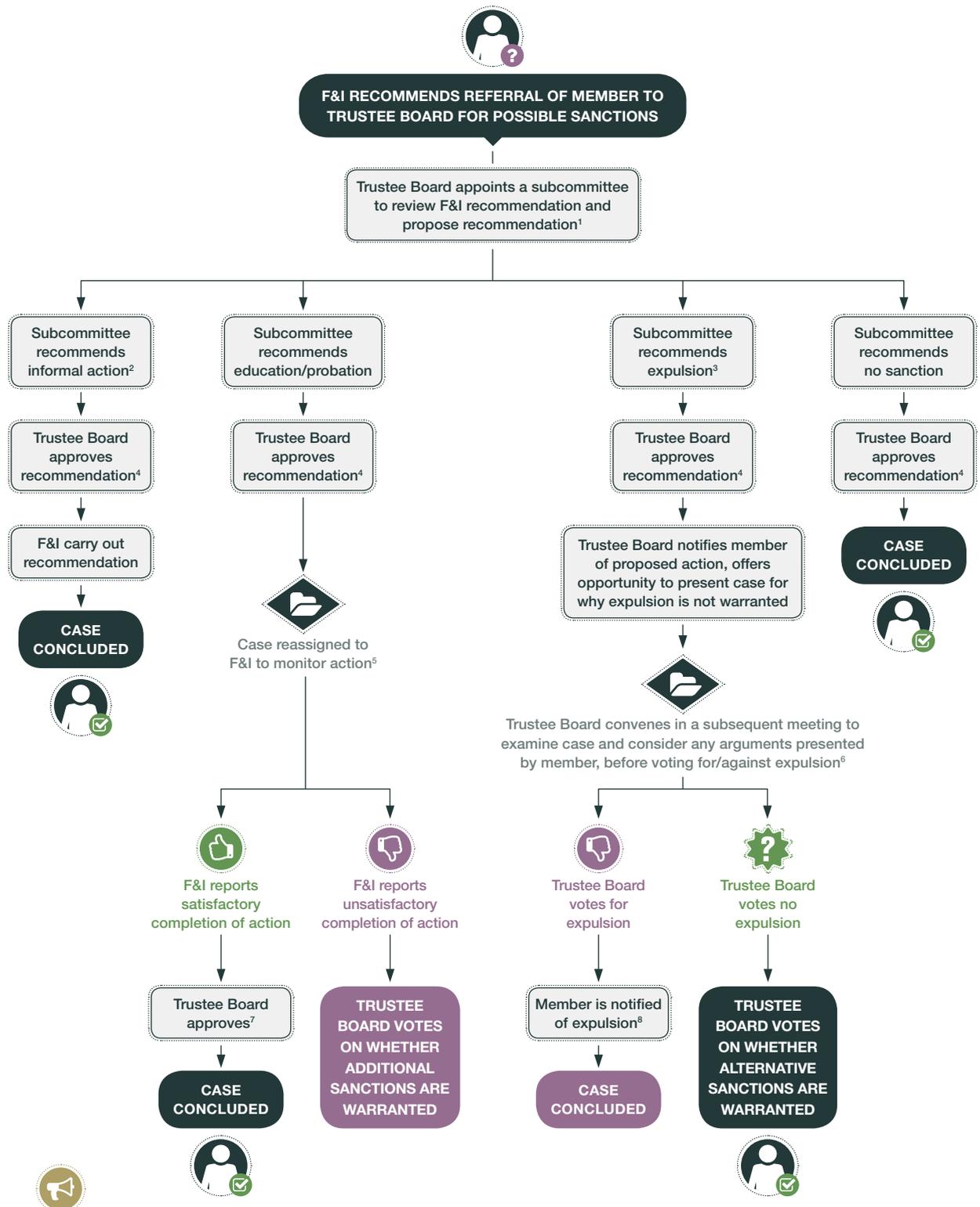
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COPE SANCTIONS PROCESS

COPE Sanctions Process



Notes:

¹Three Board members, not involved in F&I case, and with no conflicts of interest.
²Eg, an advisory opinion or letter of caution.
³It is envisioned that this action would be recommended only in extreme cases; eg, repeated occurrences, failure to meet expectations under probation; other evidence of unwillingness to abide by COPE Principles.

⁴If the full Board does not support the subcommittee's recommendation, it can vote for any other form of action (or no action).
⁵If directed by Trustee Board, this may include referral to the Membership Committee to perform a de novo review of membership qualifications.
⁶Trustee Board will determine whether member will be invited to present arguments in person or in writing.

⁷If Trustee Board does not agree with F&I assessment, it can refer back to F&I for additional monitoring and/or vote for further sanctions.
⁸While expulsion suggests a permanent remedy, COPE should consider allowing expelled member to reapply after a minimum time period (5 years? 10?) and with higher threshold required for admission; eg, upon recommendation of Membership Committee and with a 2/3 vote of full Trustee Board.

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