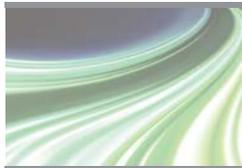




IAIA
International Association
for Impact Assessment

The social contract between impact assessment professionals, civil society, and decision-makers is that impact assessments will be conducted with integrity and will be free from misrepresentation or deliberate bias.



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FASTIPS

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Ethics

Ethical considerations are important in impact assessment, as pressure can be applied to professionals to disregard the tenets that underpin good impact assessment. Good impact assessments enhance the free flow of complete, unbiased, and accurate information to decision makers and affected parties. Impact assessments address broad social and health rights as well as issues of sustainability and biodiversity. Consideration of all pertinent matters and respect for human rights and human dignity must underpin all assessments. Nevertheless, stakeholders (proponents, clients, donors, employers) sometimes want impact assessments to emphasize their position, possibly underplaying or overplaying certain elements. Failure to comply with pressure to sway the conclusions of the assessment may result in losing a contract or future work. The party paying for the assessment may also refuse to meet the costs of work that is necessary for a full and balanced impact assessment, forcing the professional to make an ethical decision. The Fastips that follow are intended as a reminder to impact assessment professionals that they have a duty of care to both present and future generations and that the assessments they undertake are to serve the interest of society through facilitating decisions that are equitable, sustainable and accurate.

EXAMPLES OF ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Impact assessment professionals are faced with an ethical dilemma when

- The terms of reference for the assessment unreasonably constrain the study.
- Pressure is exerted to limit the scope of the assessment or to influence the results.
- Clients, authorities, or affected parties refuse to engage with a study.
- Budgetary limitations affect the ability to conduct an adequate analysis or adequately engage all appropriate stakeholders.
- The time allocated for the assessment is inadequate for a proper study.
- There is a request not to undertake certain specific specialist studies.
- It is suggested that they emphasise or exaggerate, omit, or not disclose certain topics.
- Requests are made to change words or the emphasis in draft reports that could be seen as a change in interpretation with which the assessor does not concur.
- They become aware of inaccurate reporting by clients, sub-consultants, government agencies, NGOs, donors, or the public.
- All or part of their remuneration is conditional on project approval.
- There is a request to issue either a favorable or critical review of a completed assessment.
- They are asked to assess a project in which they have a financial or personal interest or that will affect them directly.

THINGS YOU CAN DO WHEN FACED WITH SUCH DILEMMAS

- Do not suppress or hide your sense of unease; discuss the matter with your manager, or if you are the principal, with a trusted and respected colleague or mentor.
- Show the party that is causing the unease a copy of the IAIA Code of Professional Conduct and point out to them how their request, expectation, or assumption is at odds with the ethical code of your profession.
- Do not be tempted to accept a compromise that remains in conflict with your code of professional conduct. Remember a reputation for integrity and for making accurate honest assessments takes time to build but can be quickly lost.

FIVE IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW

1. The social contract between impact assessment professionals and civil society and decision-makers is that (a) impact assessments will be conducted with integrity and will be free from misrepresentation or deliberate bias, and (b) impact assessments will respect citizen rights to participate in decisions that affect them.
2. An impact assessment professional's beliefs and cultural preferences must not interfere with the fair representation of the potential impacts of policies, plans, programs, and projects. It is also improper to advance private interests to the detriment of the public, clients, or decision-makers.
3. Impact assessment professionals should seek sustainable and equitable outcomes from human actions that affect ecosystem and social functions and have due regard to the rights and interests of future generations. As different groups in society experience benefits and harm in different ways, impact assessments should strive to promote equitable access to, and use of, resources.
4. Impact assessments must be conducted and implemented in a manner that averts infringement of the human rights of any section of society and does not condone the use of violence, harassment, intimidation, or undue force.
5. Impact assessment professionals must strive for excellence by maintaining and enhancing their own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

FIVE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO

1. Be open and honest with yourself, your clients, and the public. Conduct your professional activities with integrity and professionalism, free from any misrepresentation or deliberate bias.
2. Conduct your professional activities only in subject areas in which you have competence through education, training, or experience. If asked to undertake work outside your field of competence, you should sub-contract to, or work together with, other professionals who do have the competence you lack.
3. Take care that your professional activities promote sustainable and equitable actions.
4. Refuse to provide professional services whenever you are expected to exclude reasonable alternatives from assessment, favour specific alternatives, omit or distort facts, or bias your analysis to arrive at a predetermined result.
5. Disclose all personal or financial interests that could reasonably raise concerns that there may be a conflict between your private and your professional interests.

Want to know more?

www.iaia.org/publications-resources
Downloadable Publications > FasTips

Do you have a suggestion or a request for a FasTip on a different topic?
Contact Maria Partidário (mpartidario@gmail.com), FasTips Series Editor.

FURTHER READING

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