

SR. 2.2.6: Standards of Conduct

Sierra Club seeks to be an equitable and just place to work and volunteer. In addition to our overall mission of advancing bold environmental policy, all of our actions should explicitly seek to promote equity and justice both internally and externally. All Sierra Club activity should be rooted in equity and justice, to build a Sierra Club that is inclusive, diverse in culture and lived experience, and respectful of our members and the communities in which we work. Volunteers and members have the responsibility to abide by these standards and to hold others accountable for their conduct.

(a) Affirmative Standards of Conduct

- (i) Serving as a volunteer or in an appointed or elected position of leadership is a privilege that can be lost by not acting in the best interest of Sierra Club or by violating the following affirmative standards of conduct.
- (ii) Sierra Club volunteers are responsible and will be held accountable to meet the following affirmative standards of conduct, and to hold other leaders and volunteers accountable to them as well, in all Sierra Club interactions with others, including in person, in writing, using digital tools or on the phone.
 - (A) Communicate and work together toward shared interest with common courtesy, solidarity, mutuality, and respect; work across difference and disagreement.
 - (B) Create a welcoming and inclusive environment for new members, visitors, guests, staff and volunteers. Avoid cliquishness, behavior that fosters an “insider” vs. “outsider” culture and language (including humor) or behavior that is harmful, toxic, or offensive. Seek to welcome and engage people who reflect the diversity of the community.
 - (C) Always represent Sierra Club and its mission in a positive and proficient manner, keep disagreements within the Sierra Club, and limit the impacts any internal disagreements may have on external partners and allies.
 - (D) Accurately present Sierra Club’s policies and positions when communicating on behalf of Sierra Club; don’t use a Sierra Club leadership role or title to advance personal views that are not consistent with Sierra Club’s positions and policies.
 - (E) Respect Sierra Club members’ confidentiality; use member lists and information about members for Sierra Club purposes only.
 - (F) Use Sierra Club resources wisely and in keeping with the fiduciary responsibility of all volunteers.

- (G) Foster an open democratic decision-making process; respect decisions once they are made. Wherever possible, seek opportunities to create amicable clarity about decision-making, sharing strategies, and resource distribution.
- (H) When speaking of other Sierra Club volunteers praise publicly, criticize privately and tactfully.
- (I) Encourage robust dialogue and debate and seek to resolve differences with other Sierra Club volunteers, avoiding factionalism and/or behavior that exacerbates or prolongs conflict.
- (J) Respect the policies and procedures that have been established by and for members and volunteers engaged in specific Sierra Club activities; when in doubt, ask.
- (K) Show and hold respect for colleagues at all levels; demonstrate humility, empathy, and patience; and hold oneself and others accountable for collaborating with internal and external parties in a just and inclusive manner.
- (L) Foster a work and volunteer atmosphere that promotes equal opportunities and prohibits discriminatory practices, including prohibited discrimination, harassment, and bullying.

(b) Misconduct

The following actions constitute misconduct:

- (i) Physical or sexual assault or violent threats toward others.
- (ii) Embezzling, misdirecting, or misusing Sierra Club funds, membership lists or other assets for activities not authorized by the entity responsible for following Sierra Club policy and guidelines.
- (iii) Use of slurs, epithets, threats, intimidation, negative stereotyping or other derogatory language regarding – but not limited to – gender identity, gender expression, race, ethnic or national origin, class/economic status, education, color, ancestry, medical condition, religion, age, veteran and military status, sexual orientation, or physical or mental ability, and all protected statuses as defined by the laws of the State of California, where Sierra Club is incorporated, and applicable federal law.
- (iv) Action or behavior that denigrates, threatens, bullies, shows hostility or aversion towards, or seeks to exclude an individual or group from participation based on the above characteristics.
- (v) Fraud, libel, defamation, illegal, specious claims or unethical activity of any kind in the conduct of Sierra Club business.
- (vi) Illegal or unethical conduct outside Sierra Club if that misconduct could significantly damage Sierra Club, its staff, its members, its reputation, or its assets.

(vii) Harassment, unwelcome conduct, threats or any action directed toward Sierra Club employees or volunteers that violate Sierra Club policies or are covered by law.

(c) Dealing with Disruptive Personal Behavior

(i) Volunteers have an obligation to resolve violations of the affirmative standards of conduct or actions constituting misconduct quickly and decisively. All disputes over personal behavior that may violate the affirmative standards of conduct or may constitute misconduct should be resolved at the most local level, and informally whenever possible, subject in each case to Sierra Club's legal obligations to respond to and potentially report such misconduct. Each volunteer has the responsibility to uphold these standards.

The entity chair, lead, co-lead of the relevant Sierra Club entity has an additional obligation to deal quickly and decisively with violations of the affirmative standards of conduct or actions constituting misconduct. Disputes over personal behavior may also warrant the removal, suspension or barring of the member from leadership positions or participation in certain activities.

(ii) Formal actions under Standing Rule 5.10.2 can be taken to remove, suspend or bar members from leadership positions (except members of the Board of Directors, see Standing Rule 5.10.2(f)) or participation in certain activities.

(iii) Immediate Removal and Suspensions of elected leaders from their position or from Sierra Club activities

(A) Only the Executive Director, Board President, and the Chair of the Board Volunteer Leadership and Activism Advisory Committee, (also known as “The Panel”) or their acting designee, together have authority to immediately suspend an elected leader from their positions (except members of the Board of Directors) or from their participation in specific Sierra Club activities for misconduct.

(B) Any Sierra Club member or staff who believes that an elected leader has engaged in misconduct can make a written request to the Sierra Club’s Office of the Executive Director for the immediate suspension of that person from a leadership position (excepting members of the Board of Directors) or from their participation in specific Sierra Club activities. Any action to immediately suspend an elected leader for misconduct must be based on a fair assessment (clear documentation, multiple reports, direct communication with those involved) that creates strong reason to believe that misconduct occurred.

(C) In cases of the immediate suspension of elected leaders, the process for Termination of Membership or Suspension of Member Privileges (Standing Rule 5.10.2), or the process for resolving conflicts between volunteers and staff must be used to determine whether the suspension should be reversed, extended for a specific period of time, or made permanent. One of these processes must be initiated within three weeks of a suspension.

(iv) Immediate removal and suspension of appointed leaders and volunteers

Sierra Club entity leadership may remove and/or suspend officers, representatives and committee members of their respective entities from appointed leadership positions.

(v) Removal and suspension of membership privileges

Only the Executive Director, Sierra Club Board President and the Volunteer Leadership and Activism Advisory Committee Chair (the Panel) together can remove or suspend a membership. See Standing Rule 5.10.2 Termination of Membership of Suspension of Member Privileges.

(d) Resolving Disputes

(i) Policy Disputes. When there is a dispute regarding interpretation, application or disregard for Sierra Club Bylaws, these Standing Rules, policies, guidelines or other governing procedures, leaders should seek clarification from the relevant entity, for referral or appeal if necessary to the appropriate Board Advisory Committee or the Executive Committee. No leader should act in violation of a policy interpretation that has been provided by the appropriate entity. If the leader believes the interpretation is incorrect, they should appeal or seek clarification from the appropriate Board Advisory Committee or the Executive Committee, but shall not act in violation of the interpretation the volunteer has received.

(ii) Decision-Making Disputes

(A) All Sierra Club volunteers involved in a contentious decision-making process are nevertheless expected to behave according to these Standards of Conduct. This includes decisions regarding priorities for action, strategies and tactics, and the allocation of resources where differences of opinion can be heated.

(B) All disputes among volunteers should be resolved at the most local level possible, whenever possible. If these disputes cannot be resolved locally, the Office of Chapter Support shall provide assistance in resolving disputes.

(C) Authority is delegated to the Board Volunteer Leadership & Activism Advisory Committee to develop and adapt, as needed, guidelines for resolving disputes over these Standards of Conduct. In the event of a threat of litigation relating to any of these matters, the involved entity should notify the Office of Chapter Support and the Office of General Counsel.

(D) Board Discretion. The procedures listed in this document shall not deprive the Board, at any point in the process, from taking such actions as it may deem necessary or advisable for the best interests of the Sierra Club.

Earlier version adopted as a policy 03/17-18/90; this version adopted as a SR 11/15-16/02; amended 09/10-11/04, 05/19-20/06, 02/24/07, 05/16/08, 11/20/10, 9/14/19.