



Rubric for Responding to Ethical Dilemmas

The framework below offers a structured approach in responding to ethical dilemmas. The rubric is intended to serve as a checklist that ensures all key considerations have been addressed, as well as a worksheet to document stages of the process. NACE has developed a set of [case studies](#) that follow this approach which members may find helpful in orienting their own process.

Define the Problem

When an ethical dilemma occurs, thoroughly review the nature of the issue, what is known, and who is or may be impacted.

- What are the objective, verifiable facts? What contextual information is important to note?

- Who is directly involved or affected? What other constituents are potentially impacted by the issue?

- Is this an ethical issue? A legal issue? Are there political, fiscal, or other implications?

Identify the Principles

[The NACE Principles for Ethical Professional Practice](#) serve as a framework for developing policies consistent with the profession *and* with pre-existing, binding policies or prevailing laws.

- What [NACE Principles](#) apply in this situation? What NACE case studies or advisory opinions are most relevant?

- How do current policies or existing practices at the organization apply? Are they in alignment or conflict with [NACE Principles](#)?

Consider Multiple Perspectives

Ethical dilemmas often revolve around conflicting perceptions and assumptions. The best course of action takes into account possible alternate views that seem reasonable from each party’s perspective and priorities.

- What personal, group, or organizational motivations may have led to the dilemma?

- How might those involved view the situation differently? (Also consider the views of those that may be tangentially affected.) Do these motivations or views conflict with the policies above?

continued

Map Options

While a preferred course of action may have emerged, it is useful to consider alternatives. [The NACE Community](#) can serve as a valuable resource for finding other practitioners that have encountered a similar issue and are willing to share their experience. In the case of multiple options but no clear preferred one, it may be preferable to seek an advisory opinion from the [NACE Principles for Ethical Professional Practice Committee](#).

- What options exist for responding? What are the pros/cons and ramifications of each option?

OPTION 1: _____

Potential outcomes: _____

Who is affected: _____

OPTION 2: _____

Potential outcomes: _____

Who is affected: _____

OPTION 3: _____

Potential outcomes: _____

Who is affected: _____

- Would a precedent be set? Is it possible to extend that precedent to other cases in the future?

- In each case, who would need to be consulted before taking action?

continued

Take Action

Once a set of decisions is determined it is important make a detailed plan. Include a means of tracking progress.

- What steps are involved in executing the choice? What are the time lines and who will execute each step?

- Who needs to be alerted?

Documentation

Formal documentation of the situation, analysis, and action plan, as well as which policies were applied—existing, revised, or developed in response to the situation—is advisable. Documentation may need to be shared with higher level administrators and/or legal officials.

- Who was consulted in the evaluation process?

- What resources were referenced?

continued

Evaluation

Once the issue has been resolved, a review of the process can help inform future responses. Consider sharing this issue with NACE as a case study (information identifying individuals, groups, or organizations will be removed).

- How did the dilemma resolve? What were the takeaways?

- Did an existing policy get revised or was a new one crafted because of this issue? Has the revised/new policy been communicated broadly to staff and constituents?

Developed by the NACE Principles for Ethical Professional Practice Committee