
Urban Research Institute
Governance Document

Code of Values and Ethics



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1. URI VALUES

The organization identifies itself primarily with the following values:

- Integrity: We are transparent and honest in our communications and actions and are always working to promote these values.
- Excellence: We overcome challenges by working together to find the best solutions and boost performance.
- Respect: We value cultural, gender, age, and individual diversity and treat every person with open-mindedness and kindness.
- Responsibility: We are fully committed to achieving standards and safety measures within our work, communities, and society.
- Commitment: We are committed to our work and cause and employ these values to remain motivated and adapt to changes.

2. SCOPE AND PURPOSE

This Code of Conduct serves as a reference document outlining URI policies, laws, and applicable regulations that all employees are expected to be aware of and comply with in performing their duties in line with URI's expectations. URI adheres to the legal framework of the Republic of Albania.

This Code of Conduct applies to URI, its employees, third parties, and other parties acting on behalf of URI. Third parties must comply with the principles stipulated by the URI Code of Conduct and any other contractual provision. URI may be held responsible for all the actions of third parties providing their services on behalf of URI. Third parties include contractors, suppliers, agents, mediators, lobby groups, consultants, and advisers. Throughout this Code of Conduct, the term "We" refers to all individual employees, NGO partners, third parties, and all those acting on behalf of URI.

This Code of Conduct has received the approval of all URI partners. Prior approval by URI partners is needed for any change to the Code of Conduct in the future. All employees are expected to attend the necessary training courses and should be up to date with the standards and expectations of the NGO. URI requires an annual certification ensuring compliance with the Code of Conduct.

3. INTEGRITY AMONG COLLEAGUES

It is expected that employees:

- Act at all times with a high level of professionalism, integrity, honesty, and ethical conduct when performing their duties for URI;
- Attend all necessary trainings and be updated with the standards and expectations of the NGO;

- Report any concerns about possible breaches of laws, regulations, or the Code of Conduct (Reports should be addressed to the supervisor of the group or to those specified in the Code);
- Fully cooperate and always tell the truth as part of an investigation or auditing. Employees must never erase or destroy data during investigations or before any possible investigation process.
- Participate in required trainings and remain informed of applicable standards, policies, and organizational expectations.

Further, top-level management must also:

- Proactively address and discuss challenging issues in an ethical and transparent manner.
- Foster a work environment in which employees feel safe and encouraged to raise questions and report potential breaches of policies or this Code of Conduct.
- Refrain from requesting or directing employees to undertake actions that would violate applicable laws, regulations, or this Code of Conduct.

URI investigates all reports of inappropriate behavior in line with the requirements of NGO regulations, instructions, Code of Conduct, values, and policies. To assist the NGO in this process, employees must fully cooperate fairly by contributing to a full and unbiased investigation to identify and prevent any potentially illegal or unethical activity. The investigation will be conducted confidentially while ensuring no revenge will be taken against anyone working for the NGO.

Additionally, all employees shall adhere to the legal norms and applicable regulations in the Republic of Albania. All employees must recognize laws and regulations related to the activity of URI.

3.1 Respecting Human Rights

URI operates in full compliance with the legal framework of the Republic of Albania, including all applicable labor and employment legislation, as well as relevant international labor conventions. URI is committed to upholding the principles set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In line with this commitment, URI ensures that all employees are treated fairly, with respect and dignity, and that their rights are protected at all times.

3.2 Promotion of Equal Opportunities and Diversity

URI makes decisions that promote equal opportunities and diversity regardless of gender, religious beliefs, ethnicity, physical disabilities, sexual orientation, family status, political beliefs, or other characteristics protected by law.

3.3. Non-Discrimination, Equality and Harassment-Free Workplace

URI is committed to creating and maintaining a working environment that is free from any form of discrimination and harassment. The organization applies a zero-tolerance approach to

discrimination or harassment on the basis of gender, religious beliefs, ethnicity, physical disabilities, sexual orientation, family status, political beliefs, or any other characteristic protected by applicable law.

This principle applies to all individuals engaged in URI's activities, including employees, contractors, subcontractors, consultants, and any third parties acting on behalf of URI. All such parties are required to adhere to the URI Code of Conduct as a condition of engagement.

URI ensures that this zero-tolerance approach is effectively implemented in practice through its internal rules, procedures, and reporting mechanisms. Any violation of these principles will be addressed in accordance with URI's policies, contractual obligations, and applicable legal framework.

3.4. Ensuring Health and Safety in the Workplace

The success of URI depends on creating a safe and healthy working environment for all employees and those affected by our activity. To prevent work-related accidents, employees must:

- Develop a culture that promotes a responsible approach to health and safety.
- Ensure that health and safety aspects are fully integrated into NGO activities and that employees have received the appropriate training.
- Recognize URI procedures on health and safety at work;
- Act in a responsible way and not place at risk the safety of others.
- Undertake all preventive measures when using equipment or heavy-load machinery;
- Report accidents.
- Bring potential risks due to failure to respect rules and standards to the attention of NGO directors.
- Recognize the actions to be taken during emergencies.

Additionally, when conducting business on behalf of URI, employees must not be under the influence of drugs, alcoholic beverages, and other substances that threaten safe, quality, and efficient work. This rule does not fully apply to special events organized by URI where moderate consumption of alcoholic beverages is permitted.

3.5 Respecting Privacy

URI is committed to respecting the privacy of personal data. Therefore, employees

- Only collect, record, and process personal data necessary for URI to conduct its business. All personal data will be treated in compliance with the law;
- Only process data in compliance with the applicable law and data protection policies of URI;
- Are aware, open, and transparent about the kind of personal data they collect and the purpose of its use;

- Do not disclose personal data to third parties except in cases when the procedures are compliant to the applicable law and URI policies.

4. INTEGRITY IN BUSINESS

4.1. Protection from Ethical Procurement

URI is important to the countries and the regions where it conducts its activity. Other companies and business operators are interested in signing business contracts with URI. It is crucial that URI maintains a neutral position to external pressures. All goods and services are provided by the supplier that offers the best price, quality, and level of service. Suppliers are selected through a transparent, non-discriminating, and competitive tendering process for all goods and services. Tendering criteria are made available and public. URI conducts a verifying process for all suppliers that are involved in high-risk activities to ensure that they incorporate solid ethical values.

Further, URI ensures it will:

- Not be engaged in contractual obligations beyond its authority.
- Ensure that there will be a clear separation of duties in the tendering processes.
- Sign-written contracts with our business partners. The written contract will detail the proper relations of URI and its business partner.
- Ensure that the compensation level justifies the services provided.
- Cooperate only with those business partners that incorporate URI requirements on integrity;
- Require that suppliers offer technical qualifications and ethical standards at the level of URI.

4.2 Business Information and Financial Data Accuracy

Financial data and business information are crucial to URI's success. Integrity and accuracy of such data are reported back to investors, creditors, state agencies, and other business partners. Financial data and business information must be transparent, complete, and compliant with applicable regulations and laws.

To ensure this, URI will:

- Maintain a sound and effective internal control system to assure URI donors and partners that their money is used in the best way possible.
- Ensure that all business transactions are thoroughly and accurately recorded and written in accounting registers of URI in line with the legislation in force and applicable standards of accounting.
- Ensure storage of documentation is done in line with NGO instructions on safe keeping of documents. No document may be destroyed or shredded before an auditing or

investigation process. Employees must contact the Compliance Department if they have concerns about the treatment of any specific data.

4.3 Maintenance of URI Assets

URI has placed trust in employees for using NGO assets, and they are responsible for maintaining them and using them with caution. URI assets include URI time, funds, IT equipment, materials, premises, information, documents, notes, copies, and information of different kinds used by employees or related to employees and their tasks during the entire period of employment.

To best maintain URI assets, employees will:

- Ensure that URI assets will not be lost, damaged, or misused out of any criteria.
- Ensure that URI assets will not be used to support an outside business or an unauthorized activity.
- Discourage the use of URI assets for personal purposes, although it is accepted at a minimal level and without an impact on the performance and working environment.
- Not sharing passwords with others and will not allow other persons, including friends and family members, to use URI resources and assets;
- Inform their director or the Compliance Department immediately if they have suspicions or concerns about possible thefts or acts of deception.

4.4 Communication with Other Parties

Only authorized employees must disclose or provide information to interested parties. It is imperative that only authorized employees speak on behalf of URI.

To ensure this:

- Communication with interested parties must be in line with the best international practices.
- Employees shall not make public declarations about the business activity of URI unless authorized to do so.
- Employees shall ensure that documents will be reviewed and approved by URI partners (directors) before being disclosed.

4.5 Maintaining Market Integrity

URI is committed to acting with integrity and in a fair way while competing with others. Actions and behavior that threaten fair competition are prohibited. URI will operate in the market by applying the highest ethical standards in competing with other companies within the legal space on competition and antitrust laws that also apply to URI.

URI will not:

- Make agreements for the division of markets, areas, or consumers.
- Make agreements not to compete.
- Discuss processes regarding participation in tenders.
- Exchange information about prices, market shares, or other market conditions with competitors, clients, or third parties in violation of the existing laws.;
- Assist rival companies so that they can coordinate their actions at the expense of competition laws.

Additionally, all information about competitors should be gathered publicly, ethically, and legally.

5. INTEGRITY IN OUR COMMUNITY

URI seeks to promote the economic and cultural development of the communities in which it operates. The organization aims to achieve this objective through the implementation of socially responsible and sustainable interventions.

Within this framework, URI is committed to avoiding, minimizing, and, where necessary, mitigating and compensating for any potential adverse impacts arising from its activities.

To support this commitment, URI works closely with its stakeholders and partners to apply best international practices and ensure that its interventions contribute positively to local communities.

5.1 Avoiding Corruption

Corruption hampers economic development and destroys free competition in business. Corruption also damages the reputation and exposes individuals and companies to risks. URI is against any form of indirect or direct corruption through third parties. URI will undertake active measures to ensure that no corruption practices occur in any of its business activities. URI condemns all forms of bribes and corruption. Corruption is defined as the abuse of power for personal benefit, and corruption practices include bribes, deceiving, money laundering, nepotism, and conflict of interest.

5.2 Avoiding Bribery

Bribes are defined as giving or receiving something of value in return for an action or refusal to act.

Examples of bribing could be:

- Awarding a contract to an NGO that has connections with a public official without any proper tendering procedure. The public official provides political support in return for the bribe;
- Giving a gift of high value to a public official to receive different treatment in relation to the payment of taxes;

- Offering a job to a relative of a public official in order to receive a favor, permit, or approval by that public official;
- Giving days off to tender officials for granting the tender to a particular NGO.

Measures to prohibit bribing include cases when small amounts of money are offered to low-level public officials in order to accelerate routine actions for which we are legally responsible. Such payments are also called “facilitating payments.” The pressure from the “time” factor cannot be considered a justification for such payments. The request to make such a payment must be immediately reported to the Compliance Department of URI.

Certain situations could arise where such a payment must be made when failure to do so would result in an immediate risk to the person's safety, health, and physical well-being. If a payment has been made under such circumstances, it must be immediately reported to the Compliance Department of URI. Offering gifts and inviting business partners to special events could help strengthen work relations. However, they must not be used to receive a service in return, as it might be considered a form of bribery.

5.3 Avoiding Money Laundering and terrorist financing

Under no circumstances does URI accept, facilitate, or support money laundering activities.

Money laundering is the process of creating the appearance that large amounts of money obtained from criminal activity originated from a legitimate source.

URI will always adhere to money laundering and terrorist financing national laws and regulations, as well as requirements of the funding organizations on a project basis.

URI staff internally reporting on possible money laundering and terrorist financing activities will remain anonymous.

5.4 Avoiding Conflicts of Interest

All business transactions must be made by considering the best interest of URI. Conflict of interest includes cases when an employee's personal interest is against or in open conflict with the interest of URI. The conflict of interest can be factual or perceived. Still, such situations are not always visible and clear. Employees must report them immediately to their director or the contractual representative so that URI can appropriately manage, monitor, assess, and deal with each case.

5.5 Third Parties

URI can be held responsible for the corrupt practices of third parties working on behalf of URI. Before contracting third parties, managers must ensure that the reputation, capabilities, and past experiences of third parties are appropriate and satisfactory. URI must undertake appropriate and reasonable measures to identify and value the integrity of third parties working with and for URI.

URI insists that third parties comply with its Code of Conduct, and such prerequisites must be inserted in all the contracts that URI signs with third parties.

5.6 Lobbying and Political Activities

Employees are free to attend and contribute to a political process. However, they must ensure that their personal political beliefs and activity do not represent URI in any way.

Furthermore, employees must never use URI funds, assets, and resources to support a political candidate or party. As an organization, URI will:

- Not be involved in political activity.
- Not providing any monetary or other forms of contribution in any political context;
- Potentially be engaged in political arenas, including lobbying, in debates over policymaking on issues that URI maintains garner a legitimate interest for its employees and the communities where it operates. Lobbying activities are regulated and conducted only by authorized persons by URI.

5.7 Social Media Appearance

URI requires all employees to be cautious with written communication that might be published online. If employees have an online presence in forums such as blogs, social media pages, or personal websites, they must ensure their opinions are clearly their own and that they do not leave the impression they are talking about on behalf of URI. Employees will use caution and review all communication before posting it.

Concerning the NGO's online presence, URI should not send an email or post confidential information or materials that can threaten the NGO's reputation and image.

5.8 Commitment to the Environment

Protection of the environment is one of the key priorities of URI. The NGO is aware of the obligation to contribute to sustainable development. Protecting the environment must be integral and embedded in the NGO processes of business planning, designing, and development. URI will achieve this through commitment, inclusion, training of its employees, and open communication with its partners.

Additionally, URI will:

- Utilize maximal efforts to minimize negative effects on the environment.
- Always attempt to use natural resources with efficacy and responsibly.
- Monitor the environmental impact of our activities in our work areas.
- Respond to complaints or grievances about negative environmental impacts with utmost care and consideration.

5.9 Financial or other Mismanagement

Financial mismanagement or any other form of mismanagement, including grievance, involving URI's staff, partners, subcontracted organizations or consultants, or any actor directly or indirectly related with the projects implemented from URI, will cause the immediate termination of the existing contractual relationship of any form and the due reporting by internal operation procedures and as legally required by the Albanian law, as well as additional contractual requirements of the funding organization.

A redress mechanism shall be relevant and available to those affected by URI project implementation and applicable to all project activities, identified as follows:

- A person/legal entity directly affected by the project as beneficiaries
- Residents/communities interested in and/or affected by project
- Stakeholders - people with interest in the project
- A person/legal entity directly affected by the project through contractual arrangements

Reports from any person or legal entity as from the above groups on financial or other forms mismanagement will remain anonymous as required from the person or entity.

6. IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS CODE OF CONDUCT

Every staff member is responsible for familiarizing themselves with this Code of Conduct, the complaints mechanisms they can use, and the disciplinary procedures in place. The Code of Conduct will be an induction element for staff and board members.

All persons to whom this Code applies are obliged to ensure and maintain an environment that prevents abuse of power and promotes the implementation of these principles of behavior.

Employees may face situations where they are unsure of the correct action. If employees have any inquiry about the Code of Conduct or any specific situation, they shall contact one of the following:

- Manager / Department Director (when one is an NGO employee)
- Contract Representative (in the case of third parties)
- URI Compliance Officer via e-mail: compliance@URI.com.
- Compliance Department or Human Resources Department