

Administrative Committee Report: Committee on Ethics and Grievances

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The Ethics and Grievances Committee is charged with reviewing the facts and recommending actions to the President relating to issues of ethics or grievances that have been referred to the Committee by the President. The Committee shall not consider any grievances by employees of the Society since they are covered separately by personnel procedures.

This essay is one in a series in *Acoustics Today* that focuses on the role and contribution of the various Acoustical Society of America (ASA) operating committees. Here, the purpose, history and some of the procedures of the ASA Committee on Ethics and Grievances (EGC) that I chair are described.

The purpose of the EGC is best described by quoting from the ASA Executive Council (EC) action that formed the committee.

“From time to time a member of the Society or group of members may believe that they have been treated unfairly, improperly, or unethically by an officer or committee of the Society, or by an individual acting on behalf of the Society. Such grievances may be disagreements on how the Rules of the Society are interpreted or administered, or may involve, for example, allegedly unethical action or behavior. If direct and informal discussion between the parties fails to resolve the issue, an appeal may be made to the Society by the person making the complaint...” (see acousticalsociety.org/procedures).

The EGC was established at an ASA meeting in 1998 and began operation in 1999, with Robert Apfel as the EGC’s first chair. The reasons for the committee’s origin arose from discussions of the EC in the prior years, centered around establishing a more formal means to solve ethics and grievance problems that had typically been handled by the ASA president or the ASA editor in chief depending on the nature of the complaint.

The minutes of the fall 1994 EC meeting (in Austin, TX) contain the first discussion of such a committee that is directly associated with the formation of the present EGC. Robert Apfel (president elect) and Daniel Martin (editor in chief), William Hartman (EC member), and Charles Schmidt (executive director) are recorded in the meeting minutes as supporting this idea. The EGC began thereafter as an ad hoc committee and eventually became a permanent committee in 1999, accompanied by formal ASA rule changes to codify the EGC and its charge.

The minutes of EC meetings between fall 1994 and 1998 include debates about the specifics of the charge and the wording of the rule changes associated with the EGC. Such debates will be familiar to anyone who has served on the EC. Quoting from the current ASA Rules (see acousticstoday.org/ASA-Rules-2019): “The EGC is composed of the Chair and at least three, but not more than six, additional Members or Fellows of the Society who shall be representative of the broad diversity of the Society’s membership. The Committee shall not include any current members of the Executive Council.” The ASA president appoints the chair who is then responsible for appointing new members (subject to approval by the EC). One member leaves each year.

The interested reader is directed to Section 29 of the ASA Rules that governs the charge and operation of the EGC. Anyone with an ethics complaint or grievance that has not been resolved by other avenues within in the ASA files a complaint with the president. The current procedures for filing a complaint are provided on the ASA website. The EGC does not address complaints by ASA employees because they follow a different procedure.

On receipt of a complaint, the president, often in consultation with the executive director, may choose to seek the help of the EGC to resolve the complaint. If the complaint

pertains to the president or the executive director, then contingencies are provided in the procedures. In either situation, once the case has been brought to the EGC, the committee meets, reviews the facts of the case, may seek more facts, deliberates on the case, and provides recommendations to the president and the EC at the next available EC meeting. The EC discusses the case and the recommendations in a closed executive session. Every effort is made to keep the entire proceedings confidential. The EGC may or may not be part of implementing the solution, depending on the discretion of the president and the EC.

Some hypothetical examples of cases that might be brought before the EGC are given here. One might imagine a dispute between two parties about authorship of a paper in *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America (JASA)*. This could involve a paper being submitted to or published in an ASA publication without the proper collection of authors, whether that be too many or two few authors. The complainant may first contact ASA publication staff, associate editors, or the editor in chief, who might find it useful for the EGC to collect and examine facts associated with the case. In such a case, the editor in chief would suggest to the complainant that they file a formal complaint on the matter (following the proper procedures). It is always suggested that the complainant first try to resolve the issue within the locality of the issue itself, that is, within the publication in this example.

Another hypothetical example may have to do with the unethical disbursement of discretionary funds, such as within an ASA committee. Again, the procedures suggest that the parties try to resolve the issue within the committee, but failing that, the complainant could file with the president and ask that the EGC examine the issue.

In summary, the EGC exists to help members solve problems that cannot be resolved in other ways. The interested reader is directed to read the full set of procedures and rules governing the EGC (see Section 29). Thanks to Elaine Moran, director of operations, for searching past meeting minutes pertaining to the EGC.

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