

VERITAS Collaboration Code of Conduct: Supporting a Collaborative, Open, and Inclusive Research Environment

The VERITAS Collaboration is a large collaboration with members from diverse backgrounds. We strive for an inclusive and respectful environment for collaboration members independent of their background, age, and stage or path of career. Interactions of Collaboration members with students and postdoctoral researchers are particularly important. Indeed, advancing the development of junior members in a supportive environment is an important objective for the VERITAS Collaboration.

The purpose of this policy is to state a Code of Conduct that reinforces the shared responsibility we all have for the welfare of our collaboration and community and the advancement of science. Indeed, as articulated by the American Astronomical Society and the American Physical Society, “Science is best advanced when there is mutual trust, based upon honest behavior, throughout the community.” In this regard, the Collaboration and its members also strive to be exemplary with regard to maintaining collegial, respectful interactions with the scientific community at large.

In no circumstance does this VERITAS policy supplant laws or institutional policies to which Collaboration members are subject. In any case, formal sanction or censure by one’s institution or professional society is a serious matter and will be considered as such by the Collaboration.

Respectful Treatment

All members of the VERITAS Collaboration should actively encourage collaborative, open, and respectful interactions within the Collaboration and must discourage disrespectful or hostile interactions. The Collaboration does not tolerate verbal, non-verbal or physical harassment of any kind. Disparagement, intimidation, and exclusion are not tolerated in the Collaboration. Members of the Collaboration must treat each other equally and with respect, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, national origin, physical disability, religion, age or any other attribute.

Note that behaviors and language acceptable to one person may not be to another. Members must make every effort to ensure that words and actions communicate respect for one another. If a member steps over a boundary, the member must be made aware and take appropriate action (e.g., apologize and resolve to avoid the behavior in the future).

Collaborators are expected to be collegial. When a disagreement arises, all participants must remain respectful of other individuals and be committed to constructively resolving the disagreement. All members should encourage the free expression and exchange of scientific and technical ideas. Debate is important and should be encouraged and disagreements will undoubtedly arise. While productive critical statements and feedback about issues are encouraged, personal attacks are not tolerated. Objections must be voiced in a respectful manner and resolved by collegial discussion. If members are unsure how to appropriately resolve a conflict involving a fellow collaboration member, assistance should be sought out and used (see Implementation section).

It is the responsibility of all VERITAS members to ensure that such an atmosphere is maintained. The primary Collaboration forums for scientific discussions, particularly concerning VERITAS science data analysis and interpretation as well as the development of Collaboration publications, are the VERITAS Science Working Groups. Science Working Group Coordinators, working with the Spokesperson and the Deputy Spokesperson will, if necessary, remind members of this Code of Conduct in the course of discussions.

VERITAS members should also make every effort to have respectful interactions with members of the larger scientific community, especially when representing the Collaboration at professional conferences and workshops.

Scientific Misconduct

Members of the Collaboration must perform research in a well-documented and ethically sound manner. Falsification of data or results, plagiarism, taking credit for other's work or any other scientific misconduct will not be tolerated. "Data and research results should be recorded and maintained in a form that allows review, analysis, and reproduction by others."¹ In addition, it is important that papers include "a set of references that communicates the precedents, sources, and the context of the reported work. Deliberate omission of a pertinent author or reference is unacceptable."¹

Potential conflicts of interest, e.g. related to competing collaborations, must be disclosed.

Promoting a Collaborative, Open and Inclusive Research Environment

Meetings:

When Collaboration members gather together for meetings in person or on-line, this Code of Conduct applies, although some aspects become more relevant. In particular, verbal discussions and communication must be conducted in a professional and thoughtful manner.

At Collaboration meetings, special attention shall be given to highlighting the work of graduate students, postdocs and junior members and to providing a forum for discussion with Collaboration management about issues they face, particularly in career development, and for discussing ways the Collaboration can help.

Publication Development, Review and Approval Processes:

The processes for publication development (including science data analysis) and internal reviews and approvals before submission to a journal are intended to assure the quality and scientific integrity of collaboration publications. The processes should be fair and transparent, and provide opportunities for participation from a diverse group of collaboration members. The process should also be as efficient as possible. This VERITAS Code of Conduct policy applies throughout the publication development

process (as described in the VERITAS Science Board document and implemented by the VERITAS Publications Committee).

Implementation

All VERITAS members are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct. By adding this Code of Conduct to the official VERITAS Science Board document, it becomes a policy of the VERITAS Collaboration that applies to all members, current and future. New VERITAS members will be made aware of this code.

Any collaboration member with a concern about a violation of the Code of Conduct that affects VERITAS related work should make the concern or complaint known to the appropriate persons.

If a member does not wish to make a complaint involving another collaboration member, or is unsure of whether they wish to do so, they are encouraged to contact one of the VERITAS Ombudspersons for confidential consultation. Ombudspersons are senior scientists who are widely respected by the collaboration. They are invited to serve by the Spokesperson and serve for as long as they are willing. The Spokesperson is encouraged to solicit nominations from the collaboration. There should be at least two ombudspersons, from different institutions, so that all collaboration members have access to an ombudsperson outside their home institution. For the purposes of this Code of Conduct, the ombudspersons are available to provide advice and to facilitate the informal resolution of concerns of collaboration members. The ombudspersons will not act without a request from the member who contacted them about an issue. The ombudspersons will keep communication confidential if requested by the member (to limits permitted by applicable laws). The ombudspersons can also attempt, if requested by the collaboration member, to resolve the situation among the involved parties.

At all times, the objective should be to restore an inclusive, collegial, and respectful environment for Collaboration members. Retaliation for consulting with an ombudsperson, making a complaint, or assisting in resolving a concern or complaint, is a violation of this Code. In cases where a situation arises and an inclusive, collegial, and respectful environment cannot be restored, or scientific misconduct has occurred, the Spokesperson, Deputy Spokesperson and the Chair of VERITAS Executive Committee have the responsibility to support the collaboration and have the discretion to act, with consequences ranging up to removal from the collaboration and reporting to relevant institutions, particularly in cases of apparent violation of law.

¹ See American Astronomical Society Ethics Statement at <https://aas.org/about/policies/aas-ethics-statement>