



Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

The Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct establishes ethical standards, deals with matters subject to judgment, and those other matters that may be difficult to state absolutely. It is to be understood and applied in light of its primary concern for the protection of the public interest. The principle of protection of the public interest will serve to guide members.

Principles:

1. Protect Public Interest and Maintain Integrity
2. Demonstrate Competence and Quality of Service
3. Maintain Confidential Information and Privacy
4. Avoid Conflicts of Interest
5. Uphold Responsibility to the visa agency profession

1. Protect Public Interest and Maintain Integrity

- Visa agency members must protect the public interest and discharge with integrity all duties and services owed to the public, visa agency members, and clients.
- The obligation to protect the public interest is paramount and must prevail when there is conflict with other obligations.
- Integrity and trustworthiness are the fundamental qualities of every visa agency member and are key elements of each requirement of the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. If integrity and trustworthiness are lacking, then the visa agency member's usefulness to the client and reputation within the profession will be destroyed regardless of how competent the visa agency member may be.
- Dishonourable or questionable conduct, including conduct that may be adverse to the public interest or lacks integrity, will reflect adversely on the member, the integrity of Visa agency members, and the profession as a whole. If the conduct is such that knowledge of it would be likely to impair trust in the member as a professional, then Visa agency members will be justified in taking disciplinary action.
- Visa agency members must:
 - carry out their work with due regard for public health, public safety, and the environment;
 - make all reasonable efforts to counter misinformation that could bring visa agency members and/or the profession into disrepute;
 - report problems that might result in serious damage to persons, organizations, property or the economy, to the relevant authority; and
 - not discriminate in any manner based on grounds such as race, sex, sexual orientation, nationality, social origin, family status, or disability.

2. Demonstrate Competence and Quality of Service

- Visa agency members owe their client a duty to be competent to perform any visa services undertaken on such party's behalf.
- Visa agency members must serve their client in a conscientious, diligent, and efficient manner so as to provide a quality of service at least equal to that which other professionals would expect of a competent professional in a like situation.
- Competence has to do with the sufficiency of the visa agency member's qualifications to deal with the matter in question. It includes knowledge, skill, and the ability to use them effectively in the interests of the client.
- Visa agency members must not undertake a matter without honestly feeling either competent to handle it, or able to become competent without undue delay, risk, or expense to the client.
- Visa agency members must:
 - conduct themselves in a professional manner and exercise uncompromised professional judgment;
 - be honest and candid when providing service to clients;
 - maintain professional competency and remain current in their area(s) of practice;
 - demonstrate knowledge required to undertake the work at hand and remain cognizant of and be compliant with relevant legislation, standards and bodies of knowledge; and
 - conduct their work in accordance with the legitimate rights of third parties, give proper credit where and when it is due, and conduct all activities with due regard for ownership, property rights and privacy.

3. Maintain Confidential Information and Privacy

- Visa agency members have a duty to hold in strict confidence all information concerning the business and affairs of the client acquired in the course of the professional relationship, and should not divulge such information unless disclosure is expressly (or implied to be) authorized by the client or otherwise required by law.
- Visa agency members cannot render effective service to clients unless there is full communication between them about the matter at hand. At the same time, clients must feel completely secure and entitled to proceed on the basis that without any express request or stipulation on the client's part, information disclosed to the member will be held confidential.
- Visa agency members owe a duty of secrecy to every client without exception, regardless of whether it is a continuing or casual client.
- Visa agency members must:
 - not disclose having been retained by a client unless the nature of the matter requires such disclosure or the client has expressly given the member the authority to disclosure such information;
 - not repeat any gossip about the client's business or affairs that was overheard by or recounted to the member;
 - treat all client business information as confidential, and respect copyrights, trade secrets, privacy and terms of license or other applicable agreements;
 - understand and comply with any obligations that may be imposed on them under applicable privacy legislation, including The Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, and any amendments to or successor legislation; and
 - avoid disclosure to one client of confidential information concerning or received from another client, and decline employment that might require such disclosure.

4. Avoid Conflicts of Interest

- Visa agency members must avoid situations where there is a significant risk that the interests of the member may conflict with the public and/or client. A conflicting interest is one that would be likely to affect adversely the visa agency members' judgment or service on behalf of, or loyalty to, a client or prospective client.
- Visa agency members must:
 - not place personal or professional interests or those of colleagues above interests of the public or those of clients;
 - make reasonable efforts to notify all parties involved to make full disclosure to the relevant authority if any conflict might be seen to occur by an independent third party;
 - not create hidden reciprocal relationships with third parties who stand to gain as a result of their work; and
 - inform clients of any interests which might be seen to impair their professional judgment.

5. Uphold Responsibility to the Profession

- Visa agency members must assist in maintaining the integrity of visa agency members and the profession and should participate in its activities.
- Visa agency members' conduct toward other visa agency members and professionals should be characterized by courtesy and good faith.
- Visa agency members have an obligation to support and advance the interests of Visa agency members and the profession, and to respect the rights and professional aspirations of their colleagues. This obligation includes upholding the integrity, dignity and image of Visa agency members and the profession.
- Visa agency members should:
 - participate and act with integrity in a manner that upholds the reputation and good standing of Visa agency members, and the profession in general, in relationships with anyone with whom they work;
 - participate with and support fellow visa agency members in their professional development, and provide opportunities for the professional development of new visa agency members, potential visa agency members, colleagues and subordinates;
 - make reasonable efforts to volunteer time and expertise by participating in activities that promote the advancement of Visa agency members and/or the profession; and
 - exemplify the values of equality, tolerance, and respect for others.

END OF STATEMENT

Definitions

- Conduct: The way a person behaves toward people or organizations.
- Public: Of or having to do with the people as a whole.
- Public interest: What is considered beneficial to the public.
- Client: Some person or organization paying for goods or services.
- Integrity: Quality or state of being of sound moral principle; uprightness, honesty, sincerity.
- Relevant authority: A person or group with jurisdiction over directly related areas of concern.
- Competent: Properly or sufficiently qualified or capable.
- Body of Knowledge: The prescribed aggregation of knowledge in a particular area an individual is expected to have mastered to be considered or certified as a practitioner.
- Legitimate rights: Entitlements assured in accordance with recognized or accepted standards or principles.
- Trustworthy: A characteristic of the professional whose intentions and competence can be trusted by colleagues, clients, employers, and the public.
- Third party: A general term that includes anyone not a party to a contract, agreement, instrument, etc.