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Professional Practice Guidelines for Operational Psychology

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Developed By:

Operational Psychology Practice Guidelines Task Force (OPPG TF)

## 25 **Introduction**

26 Operational psychologists provide a variety of psychological services in support of national security,  
27 national defense, and public safety. Their work often includes the assessment of personnel for high-risk  
28 positions, consultation to investigations and crisis negotiations, and support to military or intelligence  
29 operations. The practice of operational psychology differs in important ways from more other practice  
30 areas and has developed significantly over the past 20 years.<sup>1</sup> Due to these developments and  
31 psychologists' ongoing need for guidance, these *Professional Practice Guidelines for Operational*  
32 *Psychology* are provided to benefit operational psychologists and the recipients of their services.

33

## 34 **Purpose and Scope**

35 These guidelines are intended to maintain and improve the quality of operational psychology services,  
36 standardize and enhance the professional delivery of such services, encourage the practice and  
37 continued development of operational psychology, and respect the applicable rights of persons affected  
38 by such services. They are intended for use by psychologists engaged in operational support activities  
39 within the areas of national security, national defense, and public safety.

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<sup>1</sup> The American Psychological Association (APA) has a division devoted to matters of military psychology (APA Division 19, the Society for Military Psychology) that includes many psychologists who provide support to national security and national defense sectors through operational support activities, and a section of Division 18 (Psychologists in Public Service) devoted to Police and Public Safety Psychology. Furthermore, there are scientific journals and various professional outlets devoted to the interface between psychology, national security, national defense, and public safety (e.g., *Military Psychology*, *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, *Journal of Police & Criminal Psychology*), as well as key texts and journal series devoted to the ethical and professional practice of operational psychology (e.g., Civiello, 2009; Ewing & Gelles, 2003; Kennedy, Borum, & Fein, 2011; Kennedy & Williams, 2011; Kitaeff, 2011; McCutcheon, 2017; Staal & DeVries, 2018; Staal & Stephenson, 2006, 2013; Stephenson & Staal, 2007; Williams & Johnson, 2006; Williams, Picano, Roland, & Banks, 2006). Training in operational psychology is available in pre-doctoral and postdoctoral settings and the American Board of Police & Public Safety Psychology - an affiliated American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP) specialty board - now certifies psychologists practicing in related domains.

41 Operational psychologists provide services to different clientele across practice settings. They are often  
42 referred to as national security psychologists or operational psychologists by those in the intelligence  
43 community and military (Civiello, 2009; Freedman, 2009; Gravitz, 2009; Staal & Stephenson, 2013), but  
44 expansion of those functions into private industry has led to other labels as well (e.g., intelligence  
45 psychologists, security psychologists). Operational psychologists may be employed full-time or part-time  
46 as internal or external consultants to individuals or organizations. In each case, these psychologists have  
47 developed expertise that addresses the specific needs of their respective organizations and communities  
48 (Brandon, 2011). Although different communities of practice may differ somewhat in their definition of  
49 operational psychology, for the purposes of these guidelines operational psychology refers to the  
50 application of psychological science to the operational activities conducted in support of national  
51 security, national defense, and public safety (Staal & DeVries, 2018). These services typically occur  
52 through a consultative relationship that enables clients to more effectively understand, develop, and/or  
53 influence individuals, groups, or organizations to accomplish a wide and diverse spectrum of objectives  
54 from field-level operations to strategic interests of nations (Staal & Stephenson, 2013). In many  
55 instances, the work of operational psychologists may resemble that of industrial-organizational  
56 psychologists (e.g., engaged in personnel suitability assessments), or sports psychologists (e.g., providing  
57 human performance enhancement training), or police psychologists (e.g., conducting consultation to  
58 investigative teams). Thus, psychologists performing similar duties in these or other areas of applied  
59 practice may also benefit from these guidelines.

60

61 For the purposes of these guidelines, practitioners of operational psychology refer to psychologists  
62 engaged in the practice of operational psychology as described above. They apply their expertise, in  
63 general, to such non-healthcare-related tasks as personnel assessment and selection, performance  
64 enhancement, organizational consultation, intelligence and counterintelligence activities, operational

65 consultation and interviewing, strategic communication, and threat assessment and management within  
66 the realms of national security, national defense, and public safety (Staal & Harvey, 2019). These  
67 functions share some of the same applications as other areas of applied psychology (e.g., police and  
68 public safety psychology and psychologists working within law enforcement, Kitaeff, 2011). Practitioners  
69 whose professional duties align with the description of operational psychology are encouraged to  
70 consider the present guidelines.

71

72 The APA's *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (EPPCC; APA, 2017), as written, acts as  
73 a practice framework for these guidelines. (Note: As of 2020, APA Ethical Principles are being revised  
74 and a newer version will be available in the future.) In the remainder of the document, the term  
75 "guidelines" is used to reference statements that suggest or recommend professional behavior. It is  
76 important to note that whenever such guidelines are subject to change/revision, the newer version(s) of  
77 the guidelines are expected to inform practice frameworks. Consistent with the EPPCC, these guidelines  
78 are intended to be aspirational and to provide additional guidance for operational psychologists. They  
79 differ from standards in that standards are mandatory requirements for professional conduct that are  
80 enforceable and may carry legal penalties or other sanctions. In contrast, guidelines are intended to  
81 foster the development of the profession through an elevation in the quality of practice. These  
82 guidelines are neither mandatory nor exhaustive in nature. They are not applicable to every  
83 circumstance or practitioner. They are not definitive and should not take the place of sound professional  
84 judgment by a given psychologist in a given situation; as such, this framework is advisory, and  
85 operational psychologists are encouraged to exercise individual judgment in areas that are not  
86 prohibited or otherwise directed by the law, regulation, or the EPPCC. Due to the complexity of  
87 operational support activities and the evolving and dynamic nature of operational psychology, these  
88 guidelines do not exhaust professional, ethical, legal, moral or other considerations for operational

89 psychologists. They are not intended be used as the basis for disciplinary action or practice liability  
90 complaints. When applicable, federal and state laws and regulations supersede this guidance, however  
91 efforts should be made to reconcile such discrepancies whenever possible.

92

### 93 **Documentation of Need**

94 The justification of need for these guidelines is based on public benefit and the need for professional  
95 guidance, as indicated by APA policy (APA, 2015).

96

97 **Public Benefit.** Psychologists supporting national security, national defense, and public safety hold  
98 special positions of public trust and confidence. Operational psychologists have a direct impact on the  
99 security and safety of the nation, states, and local communities. Furthermore, their roles and activities  
100 are not currently addressed by any other guidelines. Given the sensitivity of their duties, the often-  
101 classified nature of their work, and the past controversies associated with their practice community,  
102 such guidelines are of significant value. Therefore, to the degree to which operational psychologists  
103 conduct their activities consistent with these guidelines, significant public benefit is expected.

104

105 **Professional Guidance.** Psychologists operating in national security, national defense, and public safety  
106 serve multiple spheres of intelligence, defense, and law enforcement sectors. These environments  
107 present challenging settings for psychological consultation. Operational psychologists are routinely  
108 confronted with various ethical dilemmas, including but not limited to dual-agency considerations,  
109 multiple relationships, consent issues, and competency challenges. Alerting psychologists to these  
110 complex issues will assist them in navigating potential dilemmas.

111

### 112 **Definitions**

113

114 **Client** refers to any individual, organization, agency or other entity employing or contracting operational  
115 psychology services. In many instances these entities may be organizations, and the operational  
116 psychologist's services may affect individuals who are not identified as clients. Operational psychology  
117 client-consultant arrangements are similar to those found in many other professional practice contexts,  
118 including but not limited to industrial/organizational, school, and forensic settings.

119

120 **Decision Maker** refers to the person or entity with the authority to make operationally relevant  
121 decisions within the domain of national security, national defense, or public safety.

122

123 **Human rights** refer to the rights inherent to all human beings. Such rights exist without regard to race,  
124 sex, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or other status. Human rights generally include the right to life and  
125 liberty, freedoms of expression, freedom from slavery and torture, and other freedoms (see Universal  
126 Declaration of Human Rights/UN, 2021).

127

128 **Operational Psychology** refers to the application of psychological science to the operational activities of  
129 national security, national defense, and public safety. These services typically occur through a  
130 consultative relationship that enables clients to more effectively understand, develop, and/or influence  
131 individuals, groups, or organizations.

132

133 **Operational Psychology Practitioner or Operational Psychologist** refers to a psychologist engaged in  
134 operational psychology practice.

135

136 **Party** refers to any individual, group, or organization that may be affected by the services provided by  
137 the operational psychology practitioner. Parties also may be clients requesting services but often are not  
138 the retaining clients. For example, when an operational psychologist is employed to provide counter  
139 insider threat consultation to an organization or agency, the requesting client, as well as the individuals  
140 with whom the psychologist interacts, are considered “parties.”

141

142 **Subject** refers to any individual, group, or organization that may be the direct or indirect focus of the  
143 services provided by the operational psychology practitioner. Subjects also may be clients requesting  
144 services but often are not the client retaining the services of operational practitioners. Subjects also may  
145 be considered a party involved as the focus or in receipt of operational psychology services. For  
146 example, when an operational psychologist is employed to provide consultation to intelligence  
147 professionals, the subject of the consultation often is another party and not the intelligence  
148 professionals themselves. In some instances, operational psychologists are employed to provide  
149 feedback to their clients about their own performance or communications. In such cases, the client is  
150 also the subject of the operational psychologist’s services.

151

152 **Third-Party** refers to any entity that requests operational psychology services (e.g., an organization-as-  
153 client), when those services are applied to, or received by, another individual or entity. For example, an  
154 organization may contract the services for an operational psychologist on behalf of their employees (the  
155 recipients of services). In this instance, the organization is acting as the third-party client while the  
156 employee receiving or participating in services is the subject (but not client). This distinction does not  
157 absolve psychologists from their responsibility to non-client entities.

158

159 **Compatibility**

160 These guidelines are compatible with the EPPCC (APA, 2017), as written, and should be considered in  
161 conjunction with them. In addition, these guidelines are intended to be consistent with existing  
162 guidelines aiding related practitioners [e.g., *Specialty Guidelines for Forensic Psychology* (APA, 2013);  
163 *Consulting Police Psychologist Guidelines* (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2016);  
164 *Psychological Fitness-for-Duty Evaluation Guidelines* (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009);  
165 *Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures* (Society for Industrial  
166 Organizational Psychology, 2018)].

167

### 168 **Disclosures**

169 There are no known conflicts of interest, nor sources of direct financial support, for the development of  
170 these guidelines. Furthermore, the authors are unaware of any potential financial benefit resulting from  
171 the development or implementation of the guidelines. Supporting literature was selected based on its  
172 relevance to the subject matter, currency, community consensus, and empirical support. The research  
173 literature in this area is has reached a sufficient critical mass within the practice community to warrant  
174 these Guidelines. Seminal works in the field have been identified and referenced accordingly. Additional  
175 consideration of opposing perspectives was also weighed and included when appropriate, and inclusion  
176 of material was determined by consensus of the practice community as agreed upon by Task Force  
177 membership.

178

### 179 **Development of the Guidelines**

180 These guidelines were developed by the Operational Psychology Practice Guidelines Task Force (OPPG  
181 TF). The OPPG TF was composed of psychologists appointed by their respective APA divisions, national  
182 board associations, and national security and national defense agencies. APA divisions believed to  
183 contain a significant constituency of operational psychologists (or related practitioners) were identified.

184 Each APA division's president was asked for an independent nomination from within their membership  
185 to the Task Force. A similar request was extended to relevant national board presidents and senior  
186 psychology representatives among related government agencies. The process for which each entity  
187 chose to identify and ultimately nominate a representative from their organization, division, or board  
188 was left to their appointed leadership and not directed by the organizer of the Task Force. Diversity of  
189 thought was encouraged while subject matter expertise was requested. The outcome of this nomination  
190 process was a Task Force both diverse in its experience, perspective, and background, while common in  
191 its depth of knowledge and community representation. Furthermore, the group was afforded full  
192 autonomy to voice opinions and opposition, to solicit advice, inputs, and guidance from their  
193 communities (and any source they deemed relevant) in aiding the development of these guidelines. As  
194 one might imagine, with diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives, the TF membership  
195 engaged in rigorous and spirited debate at times. Business rules were established at the outset that  
196 would accommodate such differences and challenges to consensus. When such moments arose, the  
197 membership engaged in a period of discovery and discussion culminating in a vote. Consensus was  
198 always the goal and generally achieved. The TF did not move forward with guideline development until  
199 such consensus was found in accordance with the business rules adopted. The OPPG TF was chaired by  
200 Mark A. Staal, PhD, ABPP (Division 19, Society for Military Psychology). Members included Larry K. Lewis,  
201 PhD (Division 13, Society for Consulting Psychology), David M. Corey, PhD, ABPP (Division 18,  
202 Psychologists in Public Service), Daniel A. Krauss, JD, PhD, ABPP (Division 41, American Psychology-Law  
203 Society), Jeffrey N. Younggren, PhD, ABPP (Division 42, Psychologists in Independent Practice), David  
204 DeMatteo, JD, PhD, ABPP (American Board of Forensic Psychology), Philip S. Trompetter, PhD, ABPP  
205 (American Board of Police & Public Safety Psychology), and Members-at-Large: Natasha M. Annis, PsyD,  
206 Paul J. Dean, PhD, Christopher A. Myers, PhD, ABPP, Daniel J. Neller, PsyD, ABPP, and James A.  
207 Stephenson, PsyD, ABPP. The OPPG TF and its proposed guidelines were supported through the

208 facilitation and review of this document in consultation and coordination with the Board of Professional  
209 Affairs (BPA) and Committee on Professional Practice and Standards (COPPS).

210

### 211 **Guidelines for Practice in Operational Psychology**

212

213 **Guideline 1. Operational psychologists strive to anticipate the direct and indirect impacts of their**  
214 **services on national security, national defense, public safety, and the parties with whom they work.**

215 **Rationale.** While upholding the standards of their profession, operational psychologists strive to benefit  
216 clients and improve society predominantly through contributions to national security, national defense,  
217 and public safety. In most circumstances, their primary obligation is owed to the nation or community  
218 they strive to serve and protect. Ordinarily they meet this obligation by advancing the best interests of  
219 the retaining client, often a governmental organization. Their obligations to the greater good do not  
220 absolve them of responsibilities that may be owed to other affected parties.

221 **Application.** Operational psychologists strive to benefit their clients and enhance national security,  
222 national defense, and public safety in many and diverse ways. Among other activities, they assess  
223 personnel for high-risk positions; support intelligence and military operations; consult to investigations  
224 and crisis negotiations; and advise leaders on strategic messaging (Corey & Zelig, in press; Staal &  
225 Harvey, 2019). In most of these activities, their work simultaneously impacts multiple individuals and  
226 organizations, including clients and other parties (Kennedy & Williams, 2011).

227 For example, when they assess candidates for positions in national security or defense settings,  
228 operational psychologists contribute to decisions that impact non-client candidates and organizational  
229 clients. Because candidates for national security positions differ in their suitability and motivation  
230 (Picano, Williams, & Roland, 2012), the resultant hiring decisions also impact the nation and community

231 that the candidate intends to serve. Operational psychologists strive to anticipate and consider  
232 potentially competing interests that may exist among candidates, their organizational clients, and  
233 society (Corey & Borum, 2013).

234

235 In situations in which competing interests are present, operational psychologists strive to (a) clearly  
236 identify their clients, the nature of the professional relationships, and the objectives of the services with  
237 all relevant parties at the outset of the professional relationships; (b) consider the rights, roles,  
238 responsibilities and status (including but not limited to diverse needs such as, culture, ethnicity,  
239 language, religion, sexual and gender orientation, socioeconomic factors, age, ability, etc.), of all parties  
240 involved; (c) identify confidentiality limits, probable uses, and accessibility of resultant work products or  
241 information; (d) weigh the likely effects their findings, recommendations, and other actions may have on  
242 clients and non-clients; and (e) take reasonable steps to promote welfare and avoid or minimize harm  
243 when it is foreseeable (EPPCC Standards 3.04, 3.07, and 3.11b; also see Moret & Greene, 2019).

244

245 Special care and consideration are required when the work of operational psychologists is classified or  
246 sensitive. Even when the work is unclassified or not otherwise sensitive, national security, national  
247 defense, and public safety settings often restrict access to individuals within those settings. Accordingly,  
248 operational psychologists may be precluded from fully disclosing all information surrounding the  
249 provision of their services (e.g., for personal safety, operational security, or practical reasons). For  
250 example, when operational psychologists support undercover public safety officers, they may be  
251 precluded from fully disclosing details to protect the undercover officer, maintain the integrity of the  
252 operation, and minimize foreseeable harm to others. Operational psychologists strive to follow the laws,  
253 regulations, and policies that govern information-sharing and handling.

254

255 Operational psychologists often work in high-threat settings, internationally and domestically.  
256 Accordingly, security requirements may dictate the operational psychologist refrain from providing full  
257 disclosure of information such as his/her name, organizational affiliation and/or professional  
258 background. In anticipation of working in such settings, operational psychologists seek to identify  
259 descriptions of their role and activities that accurately characterize the purpose of their professional  
260 engagement without violating security restrictions, endangering themselves or others, or jeopardizing  
261 organizational objectives or interests. In this regard operational psychologists strive to: (a) obtain  
262 adequate oversight from a legally authorized party; (b) document, as appropriate, their actions in a way  
263 that enables critical review from relevant authorities; (c) take care to avoid or minimize foreseeable  
264 harm to affected parties; and (d) seek peer consultation as appropriate. (See EPPCC Standards 3.04,  
265 3.11b, 4.01, 4.02, 4.05, 9.04, and 9.10; cf. Standard 8.07.)

266  
267 Operational psychologists' work activities may at times involve risk to their personal welfare, as might  
268 occur when they support combat or law enforcement operations, provide services in areas of civil  
269 unrest, or work in neighborhoods characterized by high rates of violent crime (Johnson Johnson, et al.,  
270 2011). Operational psychologists strive to recognize these risks to their physical and emotional well-  
271 being. They also understand that their failure to properly recognize such risks may increase risk to  
272 others. Operational psychologists seek to consider the impact of these conditions on the performance of  
273 their duties and the duties of others. To address these concerns, operational psychologists routinely  
274 strive to obtain data from multiple perspectives and take other reasonable steps to reduce risk of harm  
275 at all stages of a mission or operation, from planning and preparation, to execution, to completion and  
276 after-action review (AAR).

277

278 **Guideline 2. Operational psychologists seek to appreciate the broader contexts in which they**  
279 **practice—national security, national defense, and public safety—and to understand relevant social,**  
280 **political, legal, and scientific developments that may impact their work.**

281

282 **Rationale.** Operational psychology is a relatively new and emerging area of practice. Achieving and  
283 maintaining competence in areas pertinent to the work of operational psychology can often be difficult  
284 due to (a) the professional isolation often associated with supporting sensitive or classified work, (b) the  
285 absence or scarcity of specialized training opportunities, and (c) the nature of rapidly evolving, dynamic  
286 environments that can preclude careful research, preparation, and consultation (as such research  
287 becomes available, operational psychologists strive to remain vigilant in the collection and incorporation  
288 of such research into their practice). Furthermore, operational psychology is conducted in settings that  
289 consist of diverse systems, organizations, clients, and subjects. Operational psychologists strive to  
290 demonstrate and enhance their competence by actively seeking to understand these components and  
291 their unique subcultures. By doing so, they enhance their ability to anticipate, approach, and solve  
292 problems, and they build trust with those with whom they work.

293

294 **Application.** The environments in which operational psychologists practice demand a nuanced  
295 understanding of multiple contextual factors and layers of increasing complexity. For example, when  
296 operational psychologists in national security and defense settings support psychological operations  
297 against an adversary, they work from a reasonable understanding of international relations in general  
298 and strive to appreciate the history and current state of diplomatic relations with the identified  
299 adversary in particular; account for the culture, lifestyle, and attitudes of the adversary's populace; and  
300 consider the body of research relevant to their activities (e.g., persuasion and influence approaches,  
301 techniques and tactics).

302

303 They take care to restrict their services to only those areas in which they are reasonably competent  
304 (EPPCC Standard 2.01). When considering the required level of competence to perform an operational  
305 support activity, operational psychologists consider multiple factors including training and experience,  
306 availability of subject matter expertise for consultation, and complexity of tasks to be performed. They  
307 strive to consult with peers or seek supervision as warranted. And they seek to fulfill continuing  
308 education requirements in domains relevant to their work, including human and civil rights, social  
309 justice, ethics, and related areas.

310 Operational psychologists strive to remain aware of empirical advances in relevant areas to provide  
311 scientifically informed services. Examples include, but are not limited to, advances in: inquiry and  
312 investigative techniques (Brandon, 2014; Meissner, Oleszkiewicz, Surmon-Böhr, & Alison, 2017),  
313 principles of influence and persuasion (Goodman-Delahunty & Howes, 2016), cultural competence  
314 (Christopher, Wendt, Marecek, & Goodman, 2014; Hardin, Robitschek, Flores, Navarro, & Ashton, 2014),  
315 training curriculum development (Abt, Oliver, & Nagal, 2016), cognitive bias in decision science  
316 (Beauregard & Michaud, 2016;), and others (Carretta, Rose, & Barron, 2015; Dawson & Thomson, 2018).

317

318 Advances in technology create challenging opportunities for operational psychologists. For example,  
319 high-fidelity telecommunication systems facilitate distributed decision-making on the battlefield,  
320 enabling military commanders to direct combat operations while removed from the fight. This ability  
321 provides operational decision makers with a unique perspective and reduces the “fog of war”  
322 traditionally experienced by ground force commanders. But the inability to anticipate and adapt to  
323 rapidly changing situations on the ground introduces new challenges to the employment of combat  
324 forces. In such circumstances, operational psychologists may develop training to aid combat leaders in  
325 maintaining situational awareness and managing cognitive bias.

326

327 **Guideline 3. Operational psychologists make reasonable efforts to consider the legal, regulatory, and**  
328 **scientific bases of their work while taking care to respect the rights of all parties.**

329

330 **Rationale.** Organizational demands and societal needs have the potential to infringe on individual rights  
331 in settings involving national security, national defense, and public safety. Accordingly, operational  
332 psychologists strive to safeguard the rights of all affected parties as they fulfill their responsibilities to  
333 their clients, recognizing that ethical practice sometimes results in adverse outcomes for those affected  
334 by those services (Grisso, 2001). Operational psychologists strive to avoid participating in practices that  
335 are illegal or unjust, or that unnecessarily infringe upon or violate others' rights.

336 **Application.** Whether working in national security, national defense or public safety, operational  
337 psychologists encounter circumstances in which client and societal needs conflict with individual  
338 interests. Operational psychologists seek to balance these potentially competing interests by adhering  
339 to legal and regulatory requirements; using reliable data collection procedures that are the least  
340 invasive necessary for meeting the demands of their clients; restricting reports to data that are relevant  
341 and reliable; and describing as necessary the bases and limitations of their procedures, findings, and  
342 opinions (EPPCC Standards 2.04, 4.04a, 9.01, and 9.06).

343

344 For example, in national security and defense settings, senior leaders may direct subordinates to  
345 participate in psychological assessments of fitness for duty (Monahan & Keener, 2012). In conducting  
346 these occupationally mandated assessments, operational psychologists first consider laws, policies, and  
347 regulations that dictate assessment parameters; these include but are not limited to subjects' rights to  
348 refuse participation, relevant areas of psychological inquiry, and criteria that establish fitness for duty.  
349 Due consideration is paid to the applicability of job analyses, validation, and competency modeling to

350 establish the job relevance of psychological attributes being assessed. Operational psychologists use  
351 multiple sources and methods to gather relevant data, while keeping in mind potential requirements for  
352 informed consent and release of information procedures. In their efforts to remain vigilant to individual  
353 privacy interests, operational psychologists strive to report only information of probative value and omit  
354 information reasonably expected to have non-probative prejudicial impact, particularly when the latter  
355 is exceptionally invasive in nature.

356

357 Although operational psychologists ordinarily do not function as ultimate decision-makers within the  
358 organizations they serve, their opinions are usually accorded substantial weight by decision-makers. To  
359 the fullest extent possible, therefore, operational psychologists recognize that their work typically  
360 informs rather than dictates courses of action. Accordingly, they strive to present and support their  
361 professional opinions in a neutral, impartial manner, and they show measured restraint in advocating  
362 for professional opinions. When organizations place them in decision-making roles, operational  
363 psychologists strive to adequately explain the underlying bases for their decisions, and they  
364 acknowledge limitations as appropriate.

365

366 In the unusual circumstances when ethical responsibilities of operational psychologists clearly conflict  
367 with organizational demands, societal needs, human rights, or legal or regulatory authorities,  
368 operational psychologists clarify the nature of the conflict, make known their commitment to the EPPCC,  
369 seek consultation from peers when available, and take reasonable steps to resolve the conflict in a  
370 responsible manner that is consistent with the EPPCC and avoids or minimizes harm (EPPCC Standards  
371 1.02 and 1.03). Operational psychologists remain alert to any attempts to justify or defend violations of  
372 human rights that may result from seeking to resolve such conflicts. Additionally, when organizational

373 activities that violate human rights are identified, operational psychologists seek to document and/or  
374 report such findings through appropriate channels.

375

376 Operational psychologists seek to respond swiftly if they observe behavior that violates legal, moral,  
377 human rights, or ethical boundaries. For example, they may learn of a supervisory staff member  
378 engaging in sexual behavior with a subordinate, witness an investigator or guard mistreat a suspect or  
379 other detainee, observe a training cadre member exert unnecessary pressure on a trainee, or learn of a  
380 peer's conduct that casts doubt on his or her ability to maintain access to classified or otherwise  
381 sensitive information (e.g., Doran, Hoyt, Hiller Lauby, & Morgan, 2012). To the extent possible, they  
382 strive first to resolve ethical matters informally when appropriate (EPPCC Standard 1.04). When  
383 violations have substantially harmed or are likely to substantially harm a person or organization, they  
384 take care to resolve ethical matters formally through appropriate channels (e.g., referral to state or  
385 national ethics bodies, licensing boards) (EPPCC Standard 1.05). As required, they also seek to refer legal  
386 matters to appropriate legal authorities.

387

388 **Guideline 4. Operational psychologists strive to balance the demands of their organizational clients**  
389 **and the best interest of society with due regard for the autonomy, dignity, and well-being of all**  
390 **parties.**

391

392 **Rationale.** Operational psychologists seek to benefit their organizational clients and society while taking  
393 care to avoid or minimize harm to affected parties (EPPCC Standard 3.04). They respect the dignity,  
394 worth, autonomy, and human rights of all people while remaining committed to the welfare of the  
395 greater good; this includes attention to such values as beneficence, nonmaleficence, fairness, and  
396 justice.

397

398 **Application.** In national security, national defense, and public safety settings, operational psychologists  
399 face potentially conflicting demands. While supporting organizational clients, operational psychologists  
400 may contribute to adverse outcomes for individual subjects, who may or may not be aware of the  
401 involvement of operational psychologists. These situations sometimes raise concerns about informed  
402 consent and potential harm. Usually without the benefit of an interview, operational psychologists  
403 review case files and evidence of possible criminal activity, indirectly assess possible suspects, and help  
404 investigators plan operations to identify individuals who may pose a grave threat to national security,  
405 national defense, or public safety (Neller, 2019; see also Myers & Trent, 2019). Securing a subject's  
406 informed consent in such circumstances may be impossible or unreasonable (Staal & Harvey, 2019); see  
407 also (e.g., Bush, Connell, & Denney, 2006; Foote, 2017; Koocher, 2009; Myers, Neller, de Leeuw, &  
408 McDonald, 2017).

409

410 In such circumstances, operational psychologists strive to: (a) identify their clients, roles, and ethical  
411 obligations to each party at the onset of the professional relationship, and thereafter as warranted; (b)  
412 consider whether or not their consultation is mandated by law or regulation, or implied as a routine  
413 governmental activity; (c) weigh the impact that their involvement or lack of involvement likely would  
414 have on various outcomes; and (d) balance the demands of the organization and society against the  
415 impact on the well-being and rights of individual subjects (EPPCC Standards 3.04, 3.07, 3.10, 9.03).

416 When they choose to proceed with such consultations, operational psychologists take care to: (a)  
417 appropriately document the information upon which they relied; (b) determine if available information  
418 is sufficient for offering opinions based on scientific and professional knowledge; and if so, (c) report  
419 only information that is germane to the purpose of the consultation while (d) appropriately describing  
420 the limitations of their findings (EPPCC Standards 2.04, 4.04, 9.01, 9.02, and 9.04).

421

422 **Guideline 5. Operational psychologists strive to avoid conflicts that may arise from dual agency,**  
423 **multiple roles and relationships, and conflicts of interest that can occur in settings involving national**  
424 **security, national defense, and public safety.**

425

426 **Rationale.** Operational psychologists commonly pursue the best interest of society and their clients'  
427 goals while simultaneously seeking to consider the impact on affected parties. When doing so,  
428 operational psychologists clarify their roles and responsibilities as appropriate, partly in an effort to  
429 build trust with – and safeguard the welfare, rights, and privacy of – those with whom they interact  
430 professionally. They also guard against political, organizational and social factors that might lead to  
431 misuse of their work or influence, or that could impair their objectivity. When conflicts arise, they seek  
432 to manage them responsibly and in a way that promotes welfare and minimizes harm (EPPCC Standard  
433 3.04).

434

435 **Application.** Some operational psychologists are embedded in the units to which they offer services, and  
436 therefore may encounter ethical challenges similar to psychologists who practice in rural community  
437 settings. For example, they may act as special staff advisors to senior leaders; *ad hoc* project consultants  
438 to middle management; and trainers, performance enhancement coaches, and sometimes even  
439 counselors to other personnel. Other operational psychologists work closely as consultants with units to  
440 accomplish objectives ranging from supporting dynamic field operations to assisting leaders and  
441 managers with decisions that have strategic implications. These operational psychologists are often  
442 linked to the actions of their clients, and as such, they seek to partition their involvement from  
443 any action or activity if that action or activity compromises their ethical duties. Accordingly, they strive  
444 to diligently manage the ethical obligations they owe to a wide range of parties in ways deemed

445 acceptable by the broader profession (Johnson, 2008; Moret & Greene, 2019; Staal & King, 2000; Zur &  
446 Gonzalez, 2002).

447

448 When one or more competent peers is available to share in service delivery, operational psychologists  
449 strive to delineate their roles and functions in a manner that enhances effectiveness and reduces  
450 problems that may arise from dual agency, multiple roles and relationships, and conflicts of interest  
451 (EPPCC Standard 3.09; see also Standard 10.04). If it becomes apparent that operational psychologists  
452 may be called upon to perform potentially conflicting roles that are reasonably expected to impair their  
453 effectiveness, they take reasonable steps to clarify and modify, or withdraw from, roles as appropriate  
454 (cf. EPPCC Standard 10.2).

455

456 For example, in public safety settings, operational psychologists embedded within crisis negotiation  
457 units may assume a variety of responsibilities (Fagan, 2009; Hatcher, Mohandie, Turner, & Gelles, 1998).

458 At the onset of crisis incidents, organizational leaders might direct operational psychologists to review  
459 press releases before their publication. Crisis negotiation teams (CNTs) might request assessments of  
460 the likely mental state of hostages or barricaded victims, of the mental state and potential violence risk  
461 posed by hostage-takers or barricaded subjects, and of the stress levels of CNT members. Following  
462 incidents, management might direct operational psychologists to support debriefings of CNT members,  
463 hostages or victims; provide brief therapeutic care to involved parties, including coworkers; and  
464 participate in AARs. In such instances, operational psychologists remain acutely aware of their  
465 limitations and boundaries of competence in providing any clinical services, and they further strive to  
466 clarify these limits to all parties involved. Based in part on results from AARs, management or line staff  
467 might ask operational psychologists to support the development of training programs intended to  
468 improve performance of CNTs in future operations.

469

470 Similarly, when embedded in compartmented programs in national defense settings, operational  
471 psychologists often are the sole providers of a wide variety of services delivered to multiple individuals  
472 (Dean & McNeil, 2012). Operational psychologists may influence the assessment and selection of  
473 personnel for entry into these programs; offer training to new personnel on a number of topics relevant  
474 to the organizations' missions; routinely reassess personnel periodically to support determinations of  
475 continued fitness, counterintelligence risk, or other organizational needs; consult to peers and  
476 command staff on organizational development; and provide brief therapeutic interventions to all  
477 program personnel as needed.

478

479 Operational psychologists in national security positions also might routinely make rounds during  
480 temporary tours of duty at geographically separated units. During or after the tours, operational  
481 psychologists may broadly discuss with management their perceptions of morale within the units. If  
482 management requests specific information about potentially identifiable personnel, operational  
483 psychologists strive to deny providing the requested information unless: (a) the subject consents to such  
484 disclosure or presents a substantial risk to self, others, mission or operation; or (b) disclosure is  
485 otherwise permitted by law or regulation (EPPCC Standards 3.10, 4.01, 4.02, and 4.05). Whenever  
486 reasonable and permitted, operational psychologists seek to notify affected individuals of such  
487 disclosures.

488

489 Given their varied roles and responsibilities, operational psychologists strive to anticipate conflicts that  
490 can arise as a result of dual agency, multiple roles and relationships, and conflicts of interest. In each of  
491 their roles, they strive to identify their primary clients as they enter into professional relationships; and  
492 they refrain from entering into relationships that could reasonably be expected to impair their

493 objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in performing their duties, or that otherwise risk exploiting or  
494 harming their clients (EPPCC Standards 3.05a, 3.06, and 3.07). If they find potentially harmful multiple  
495 relationships have arisen, they seek to take reasonable steps to resolve the matter, with due regard to  
496 the best interests of the impacted party and maximal compliance with the EPPCC (EPPCC Standard  
497 3.05b). As conditions change, operational psychologists seek to ensure relevant parties are aware of any  
498 changing roles and functions, as necessary, while striving to cooperate with coworkers to the fullest  
499 extent feasible (EPPCC Standard 3.09).

500

501 **Guideline 6. Operational psychologists strive to consider factors of diversity, equity, and inclusion**  
502 **(DEI) when conducting assessments and providing other services.**

503

504 **Rationale.** Operational psychologists take care to consider the unique backgrounds of individuals with  
505 whom they work, as they strive to benefit their clients, respect and safeguard the rights of others, and  
506 promote accuracy in practice. Such individual background factors include but are not limited to culture,  
507 language, race, ethnicity, sex, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious preference,  
508 socioeconomic status, and disability. Operational psychologists strive to eliminate the effect of biases  
509 based on those factors while conducting their professional activities. They take precautions to ensure  
510 their potential biases do not condone unjust practices.

511

512 **Application.** Psychologists working in national security, national defense, or public safety may conduct  
513 their assessments and activities outside of the United States, which increases the salience of paying  
514 consideration to diversity. But diversity poses a challenge to the work of operational psychologists inside  
515 the United States as well. Operational psychologists conducting services with culturally diverse groups

516 strive to be mindful of their boundaries of expertise and seek training and consultation whenever  
517 working in areas that may challenge their competence (APA, 2017b).

518

519 Although practitioners are expected to be competent in cross-cultural psychology (APA, 2017), diversity  
520 presents significant challenges to the systematic study of individuals: most psychological research has  
521 been conducted on Western populations (e.g., Rad, Martingano, & Ginges, 2018); theories of  
522 motivation, needs, relational styles, and cognitive processes differ among cultural groups (Hui, 1985);  
523 and measures thought to be culture-free or culture-fair may, in practice, be neither culture-free nor  
524 culture-fair (Staal, 2012). Moreover, a host of cultural biases and related risks are well-known  
525 (Christopher et al., 2014; Hardin et al., 2014). Operational psychologists working with diverse groups  
526 strive to be aware of these issues and seek to minimize their negative impacts. When appropriate  
527 empirical data, measures, or methods are unavailable, operational psychologists make clear the  
528 limitations of their services and probable impact on their work products.

529

530 It is not uncommon for operational psychologists conducting assessments to speak a primary language  
531 that is different from that of the subject of their work. Such situations ordinarily require the services of  
532 an interpreter. When using interpreters, operational psychologists: (a) take reasonable steps to assess  
533 the professional qualifications and delineate expectations of the interpreter prior to commencing  
534 activities, making clear the rules of confidentiality; (b) seek assent or consent from the subject as early  
535 as is feasible and as appropriate; (c) strive to foster collaboration among all parties; and (d) when  
536 feasible, debrief the interpreter following service delivery (e.g., Australian Psychological Society, 2013;  
537 British Psychological Society, 2017; Frandsen, 2016; Staal & Bluestein, 2019).

538

539 Operational psychologists strive to remain aware and knowledgeable of applicable laws, regulations,  
540 cultural considerations, diverse needs, and other guidelines that inform their ethical practice when  
541 working with diverse populations; they use this knowledge when designing, selecting, employing,  
542 reviewing and/or revising the theories, tools, techniques and research methodologies employed in their  
543 practice. For example, several of the most important legislative acts relevant to personnel assessment  
544 considerations include the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), the Civil Rights Act (1964), the Equal  
545 Employment Opportunity Commission’s Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection (1978), and the  
546 Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (2008). These provide vital protections against  
547 discriminatory practices based on diversity factors and represent minimum requirements that must be  
548 incorporated into any personnel suitability assessment program (Corey, 2012).

549

550 **Guideline 7. Operational Psychologists seek to select and rely on evidence-based assessment**  
551 **materials and procedures in the conduct of their work.**

552

553 **Rationale.** Operational psychologists rely on a variety of assessment procedures. Failure to identify and  
554 employ procedures yielding scores that are valid and reliable for the contexts in which they are used  
555 may degrade the accuracy and efficacy of their assessments, resulting in a reduction in the usefulness  
556 and value of the process and its outcome for clients. Accordingly, operational psychologists strive to use  
557 procedures in light of the evidence on their usefulness with members of the population tested (EPPCC  
558 Standard 9.02). In addition, as appropriate, operational psychologists strive to ensure that assessment  
559 tools and procedures align with the “Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures” (1978),  
560 “Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures” (SIOP, 2018), “Evidence-Based  
561 Practice in Psychology” (APA, 2006), “Standards on Educational and Psychological Testing” (AERA, APA,

562 NCME, 2014), and other empirically-informed guidelines, principles or practices that are widely accepted  
563 by the operational psychology community.

564

565 **Application.** Operational psychologists seek to employ assessment procedures that produce valid and  
566 reliable information for the contexts in which they are used. They also seek to guard the integrity of the  
567 psychometric properties of tests and ensure that the conditions of administration indicated in the test  
568 manual are preserved when adapted for use with national security or defense personnel or purposes.  
569 Operational psychologists strive to use test norms derived from similar populations or comparative  
570 samples when available. Operational psychologists seek to recognize the limitations of all such  
571 instruments and procedures, and to be ready to address these limitations and their potential impact. In  
572 this spirit, operational psychologists recognize that test results often guide the decision-making process  
573 rather than provide conclusive results.

574

575 **Guideline 8. Operational Psychologists are mindful of the importance of establishing and maintaining**  
576 **competence when providing services to their clients.**

577

578 **Rationale.** Psychologists have a primary ethical obligation to provide professional services only within  
579 the boundaries of their competence based on their education, training, supervised experience,  
580 consultation, study or professional experience (EPPCC, Standard 2.01). As with all new and emerging  
581 areas in which generally recognized standards for preparatory training do not yet exist, operational  
582 psychologists practice competently by carefully reviewing the existing seminal literature cited here,  
583 adapting evidence-based practices from related fields, extrapolating ideas from relevant research, and  
584 taking measures to mitigate harm (EPCCC, Standard 2.01.e). Operational practitioners also assume the  
585 responsibility for seeking consultation from more experienced practitioners, and assessing and

586 continuously evaluating their competencies, training, consultation, experience and risk management  
587 practices required for competent practice (EPPCC, Standard 2.03).

588

589 **Application.** Operational psychologists strive to obtain relevant professional training to develop their  
590 requisite knowledge and skills. Acquiring competence may require pursuing additional educational  
591 experiences and training, including but not limited to a review of the relevant literature, attendance at  
592 existing training programs, and continuing education specific to the delivery of operational consultation  
593 services to national security, defense, or public safety sectors.

594

595 Research may not be available that specifically addresses some professional activities. Despite such  
596 absences, operational psychologists may still choose to provide the services requested by their clients.  
597 The lack of documented support may not indicate that the services are ineffective. However, in such  
598 cases, consultation, informed consent, and additional documentation regarding known limitations may  
599 be warranted.

600

601 Operational psychologists continually strive to grow their expertise beyond basic level requisite  
602 competence. Such professional development is sought through formal coursework, additional training,  
603 consultation, and mentorship from operational practitioners with greater experience. Operational  
604 psychologists seek to grow their abilities through the cross-pollination of ideas, the knowledge of  
605 effective strategies and techniques, and the pursuit of scientifically based innovations related to their  
606 work.

607

608 **Expiration**

- 609 This document will expire as APA policy in 10 years (2031). Correspondence regarding the 2021
- 610 Guidelines for Psychological Practice in Operational Psychology should be addressed to the American
- 611 Psychological Association, Practice Directorate, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, 20002-4242.

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