The concept of professionalism implies a dedication to learned and uncompromised professional judgment above all other motivations. Graphic Design is still a very young profession, and it is hoped that the introduction of this document will encourage members to act cohesively to reinforce their professional status.

We ask you to read this code carefully and to use its principles to govern your professional activities. We ask that you bring it to the attention of not only your colleagues but also your students, your clients, and the public. We intend it to be a statement of what the public may expect of designers, what designers may expect of each other, and to affirm our resolve to uphold the highest levels of professional responsibility.

This document is based on the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct published by the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (Icograda). The AIGA code is intended to conform with the Icograda code, while at the same time clarifying its meaning and content in the context of U.S. practice.

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The purpose of this code is to provide all AIGA members with an accepted standard of ethics and professional conduct. It presents guidelines for the voluntary conduct of members in fulfilling their professional obligations.

For the purposes of this code the word “Designer” means an individual, practicing design as a freelance or salaried graphic designer, or group of designers acting in partnership or other form of association.

1.1 A designer shall at all times act in a way which supports the aims of the AIGA and its members, and encourages the highest standards of design and professionalism.

1.2 A designer shall not undertake, within the context of his or her professional practice, any activity that will compromise his or her status as a professional consultant.

2.1 A designer shall act in the client’s best interests within the limits of professional responsibility.

2.2 A designer shall not work simultaneously on assignments which create a conflict of interest without the agreement of the clients or employers concerned, except in specific cases where it is the convention of a particular trade for a designer to work at the same time for various competitors.

2.3 A designer shall treat all work in progress prior to the completion of a project and all knowledge of a client’s intentions, production methods and business organization as confidential and shall not divulge such information in any manner whatsoever without the consent of the client. It is the designer’s responsibility to ensure that all staff members act accordingly.
3.1 Designers in pursuit of business opportunities should support fair and open competition based upon professional merit.

3.2 A designer shall not knowingly accept any professional assignment on which another designer has been or is working without notifying the other designer or until he or she is satisfied that any previous appointments have been properly terminated and that all materials relevant to the continuation of the project are the clear property of the client.

3.3 A designer must not attempt, directly or indirectly, to supplant another designer; nor must he or she compete with another designer by means of unethical inducements.

3.4 A designer must be fair in criticism and shall not inaccurately denigrate the work or reputation of a fellow designer.

3.5 A designer shall not accept instructions from a client which involve infringement of another person's property without permission, or consciously act in any manner involving any such infringement.

3.6 A designer working in a country other than his or her own shall observe the relevant Code of Conduct of the national society concerned.

4.1 A designer shall not undertake any work for a client without adequate compensation, except with respect to work for charitable or non-profit organizations.

4.2 A designer shall not undertake any speculative projects either alone or in competition with other designers for which compensation will only be received if a design is accepted or used. This applies not only to entire projects but also to preliminary schematic proposals.

4.3 A designer may take part in any open or limited competition for work whose terms are approved by the AIGA.

4.4 A designer shall work only for a fee, a royalty, salary or other agreed upon form of compensation. A designer shall not retain any kickbacks, hidden discounts, commission, allowances or payment in kind from contractors or suppliers.

4.5 A reasonable handling and administration charge may be added, with the knowledge and understanding of the client, as a percentage to all reimbursable items, billable to a client, that pass through the designer's account.

4.6 A designer who is financially concerned with any suppliers which may benefit from any recommendations made by the designer in the course of a project shall secure the approval of the client or employer of this fact in advance.

4.7 A designer who is asked to advise on the selection of designers or other consultants shall accept no payment in any form from the designers or consultants recommended.
Publicity

5.1 Any self-promotion, advertising, or publicity must not contain deliberate misstatements of competence, experience or professional capabilities. It must be fair both to clients and other designers.

5.2 A designer may allow a client to use his or her name for the promotion of work designed or services provided but only in a manner which is appropriate to the status of the profession.

Authorship

6.1 A designer shall not claim sole credit for a design on which other designers have collaborated.

6.2 When not the sole author of a design, it is incumbent upon the designer or design firm to clearly identify their specific responsibilities or involvement with the design. Examples of such work may not be used for publicity, display or portfolio samples without clear identification of precise areas of authorship.

Notes on the Code

The wording of the code was developed to be as clear and unambiguous as possible. There are, however, certain specific instances of accepted practice which differ from general principles. These have been referred to in the relevant clauses:

Clause 2.2: It is the designer's responsibility to point out and resolve any problems arising from working simultaneously for clients who are in direct commercial competition. It may, of course, be necessary for a designer to decline commissions if such a conflict cannot be resolved. Some examples of work that is excluded because of trade conventions are books, book jackets, and record jackets.

Clause 4.1 and 4.2: The purpose of these two clauses is to encourage a level of compensation conducive to competent performance, to strengthen members' resolve to insist upon an adequate financial reward for their services, and to discourage the unfair manipulation of members into providing free services with the hope of gaining a commission. The correct course of action for a client who wishes to evaluate the specific concepts of competing designers is to evaluate the potential firms by means of interviews, select those designers in which they are interested, and pay each full fees for a schematic presentation prior to proceeding with a commission to the successful competitor. In the event that any member is approached to undertake speculative work, the proposal should be declined and the above procedure suggested.