

Code of ethics and conduct

Access to Seeds Foundation

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1. Access to Seeds Foundation

The Access to Seeds Foundation is based in the Netherlands and publishes the Access to Seeds Index on a biennial basis. The Foundation understands the public nature of the responsibility it is entrusted with and acts at all times to ensure public trust and organizational integrity consistent with its mission.

2. Mission

The Access to Seeds Foundation has been established to encourage the seed industry to bridge the gap with the smallholder farmer. In particular, it aims to reach that goal by creating and publishing an independent Access to Seeds Index. The Index measures the performance of individual seed companies with respect to efforts to enhance the degree by which smallholder farmers benefit from their knowledge, technologies, varieties and seed. The Index seeks to establish and improve benchmark performance over time. The methodology of the Index is based on a balanced stakeholder agenda, developed through dialogue. Transparent criteria, accurate, impartial and reliable measurements and unbiased and independent publication of results are crucial to the credibility of the Index as well as the Foundation itself.

3. Purpose of the Code of Ethics and Conduct

This document serves to set out the fundamental principles and standards that the Foundation strives to maintain, and as a guide to the actions and decisions of all those working with and for the Foundation.

4. Guiding Principles

The Access to Seeds Foundation approaches its tasks and works with others based on the following principles:

Not-for-profit: the organization acts for the public good and all funds are employed in the pursuit of its mission.

Independence: independence of governance, funding and perspective are essential to the integrity and credibility of the Foundation, and enables the realization of impartiality towards all stakeholders.

Transparency: transparency of management, activities, methodology and findings supports public trust and accountability.

Respect: respect for the mission of the Foundation aligns with respect for the process of fairly representing the collective view of society's expectations of seed companies and respect for the views of all stakeholders.

Collaboration: the Foundation collaborates with other organizations to avoid overlap and duplication of effort, where there are shared values, common aims, and activities are for the good of society.

Affirmation: through the Index, the Foundation acknowledges the positive progress and efforts of companies towards access to seeds practices.

Inclusivity: the Foundation works from an inclusive perspective towards all belief, culture, gender, race, ethnicity, and national and regional considerations.

Care for the environment: the Foundation strives to consider environmental and social sustainability in all its actions.

5. Governance

Independence and autonomy

- The Foundation is registered as a not-for-profit entity in the Netherlands.
- The Foundation is governed by a two-tier board with a Supervisory Board consisting of members who are independent of and impartial towards the seeds industry.
- The Executive Board, which consists of the Executive Director and Operating Director, reports to the Supervisory Board and is responsible for the effective running of the organization.
- All board members, staff and consultants employed by the Foundation are required to sign a Conflict of Interest declaration (GOV-004) and Non-disclosure agreement recipient (GOV-102)
- The Foundation does not act as an instrument of government foreign policy, nor is it controlled by any government, multilateral organization or other interest group.
- The Foundation acts solely in accordance with its mission.

Financial and Legal

- The Foundation employs all funds in pursuit of its mission in a prudent, pre-approved and fair manner.
- The Foundation ensures good internal financial controls and the annual audited accounts are published on its website.
- The Foundation and its board and staff are familiar with the legal requirements in the jurisdiction of the Netherlands and act in good faith within the law, also in other jurisdictions wherever it is active.
- The Foundation strongly opposes corruption, bribery and other financial improprieties or illegalities and acts proactively to safeguard against such eventualities.
- The Foundation and its board, staff and contractors refuse all significant gifts or offers of in-kind support that might be interpreted as unduly influencing the actions and decisions of the Foundation.

Stewardship

- The Foundation ensures that all spending practices and policies are fair, reasonable and appropriate to fulfill the mission of the Foundation including for the remuneration of people and compensation for foundation-related expenses.
- The Foundation does not accumulate operating funds excessively.
- All financial reports are factually accurate and complete in all material respects.

Accountability

- The Foundation is open and honest in all its dealings with board, staff, council and committee members, donors, stakeholders, partners, companies, governments and other interested parties.
- The Foundation is accountable for its actions and decisions not only to its donors but also to its mission, staff, stakeholders, partners and society at large.
- The Foundation regularly seeks feedback on its activities from stakeholders, users, partners, donors, and other interested parties.
- The Foundation reviews and evaluates the Access to Seeds Index and the consultative process after each cycle and strives for continuous improvement through stakeholder and expert engagement.
- The Foundation periodically reviews the effectiveness of its work in relation to its stated goal.
- The Annual Report is publically and freely available.

6. Fundraising

- The Foundation receives funding from government and philanthropic sources independent of seeds and related industries.
- All activities are designed to meet the requirements of the Foundation's mission, not to support the needs of a funder unless the objectives are mutual.
- The effectiveness and influence of the Foundation in realizing its aims is dependent on the level of neutrality, impartiality and independence it can demonstrate to the satisfaction of all stakeholders. Consequently:
 - all donors are required to confirm their support for the aims of the Foundation;
 - the Foundation does accept funding from governments, civil society and philanthropic foundations as long as this does not compromise Foundation principles, nor restrict its ability to address relevant issues freely, fairly and objectively.
 - the Foundation does not accept funding or other contributions from the seeds industry and related sectors;
 - a range of donors ensures that no donor funds more than 60% of each Index cycle;
 - the Foundation aims to source funding from geographically diverse regions to ensure a globally inclusive donor profile.
- The Foundation minimizes expenditure on fundraising to ensure effective utilization of funds.
- The Foundation does not pay professional retainers or commissions for fundraising.
- Expenditure by the Foundation aligns with the agreed budget and operational plan presented to the donor, and if a change is required for whatever reason, the Foundation communicates timeously with the donor and comes to a mutual agreement in writing.
- The Foundation does not expend funds in anticipation of unconfirmed donations.
- The Foundation reports in full according to the agreement it has with each donor.

7. Openness and Disclosure

- All public dissemination of information and comment should be accurate, objective and presented in the proper context.
- Information should be presented in a fair and unbiased manner and where bias is unavoidable or inherent, it should be disclosed.
- The Foundation implements clear internal policy guidelines for the approval of written and verbal statements on behalf of the Foundation.

- As a public-benefit organization the Foundation does not improperly assume the authority of society at large or any stakeholders.
- The Foundation provides comprehensive and timely information to the public, donors, the media and all stakeholders, and is responsive to reasonable requests for information.
- The Foundation's Code of Ethics, Governance Charter (GOV-001) and Conflict of Interest declaration (GOV-004) and Non-disclosure agreement (GOV-101 / GOV -102) are posted on the Foundation's website.
- The methodology of the Access to Seeds Index is developed through a multi-stakeholder process to ensure a broad consensus of what society expects from seed companies.
- The methodology, individual company analyses and the resulting ranking of the Access to Seeds Index is transparent and publicly available.

8. Human Resources

- The Foundation appoints competent staff and consultants and ensures that they are cognizant of the public-benefit nature of the Foundation and act accordingly.
- The Foundation appoints staff on an inclusive basis.
- The Foundation encourages an atmosphere of respect and courtesy in all its internal and external interactions.
- The Foundation provides people with the necessary tools, knowledge and information to fulfill their functions in a professional and committed manner.
- The Foundation encourages the continual professional development of members of staff and accommodates this wherever possible.
- The Foundation makes the human resources policy and operational procedures available in writing to all members of staff.