



## ESI Principles of Conduct and Engagement

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### Introduction

This document is a statement of the principles that guide the MIT Environmental Solutions Initiative (ESI) in its conduct with and engagement toward the MIT community and all others. *Part I: Conduct* addresses the underlying purpose of our programming and the manner in which we develop and administer our activities with the MIT community and others beyond the institute. *Part II: Engagement* addresses the nature of our relationships with entities within and especially beyond MIT including partners and supporters of our mission. The various mechanisms and administrative processes required to deliver on our principles are alluded to but not comprehensively detailed within this document.

The mission of the MIT Environment Solutions Initiative, as stated in our publications and public representations, is “to advance science, engineering, policy, social science, design, the humanities, and the arts toward a people-centric and planet-positive future.” ESI is, through our mission and mandate, a public-facing entity and our capacity to do the most good depends on our credibility in embodying the same values of equity and sustainability that we promote through our activities.

ESI follows and upholds all MIT policies regarding [nondiscrimination<sup>1</sup>](#) and [responsible and ethical conduct<sup>2</sup>](#). These principles have been developed in alignment with and are intended to be harmonious with MIT’s expectations of responsible and ethical conduct in the classroom, workplace and laboratory as stipulated in the Faculty Rules and Regulations and through the various codified practices as represented by the Office of Sponsored Programs, Office of the General Counsel, Vice President for Human Resources, Vice President for Finance, Risk Management & Compliance Services, Vice President for Research, Institute Auditor, and Ombuds Office, among others.

### Part I: Conduct

In addition to established and institute-wide policy, ESI commits itself to the following principles of conduct in alignment with our mission, our values, and our responsibility to model an organizational commitment to equity and sustainability.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://referencepubs.mit.edu/what-we-do/nondiscrimination-policy>

<sup>2</sup> <http://conduct.mit.edu/>



## A. Environmental Responsibility

- We demonstrate best practices for environmental stewardship and regeneration in our operations, within the constraints of MIT's existing facilities and supply chains. We minimize waste of all kinds in our workplace and activities, choose recycled or sustainably sourced supplies and materials, and are mindful of the environmental impact of food served at our events. As far as possible consistent with the broad geographic dispersal of ESI's activities, we avoid carbon-intensive modes of travel such as flying or driving in a gas combustion powered vehicle.
- We embrace opportunities to experiment with environmental practices new to MIT, including construction and outfitting of carbon-neutral or carbon-negative facilities, and strategies for reducing or offsetting emissions from our activities and operations. We actively partner with other groups at MIT seeking to make a broader impact on campus, who want to learn from our practices, or from whom we can learn. As our operations expand, we resolve to provide an ever more ambitious model for businesses to move toward zero carbon emissions and an eventual drawdown of carbon from our atmosphere.
- We resolve that new practices we adopt should be replicable by other groups at MIT and by peer institutions. We publicize new and impactful practices and we share methodologies for others to make use of.

## B. Equity and Inclusion

- We maintain a zero-tolerance policy for harassment and discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, religion, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, or national or ethnic origin. Any substantiated episode of harassment or discrimination in the workplace, on campus, or in pursuit of any of ESI's activities is grounds for immediate disciplinary action up to and including termination. This is aligned with MIT's Nondiscrimination Policy<sup>3</sup>, as well as its policy on harassment<sup>4</sup>.
- We are conscious of how our partnerships may affect vulnerable communities or be misconstrued as endorsements of discriminatory viewpoints or behavior. As specified in our Principles of Engagement, we will not engage with individuals who, and organizations and other entities that disparage, denigrate or seek to harm directly or indirectly individuals or groups of people.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://referencepubs.mit.edu/what-we-do/nondiscrimination-policy>

<sup>4</sup> <https://policies.mit.edu/policies-procedures/90-relations-and-responsibilities-within-mit-community/94-harassment>



- We take seriously our responsibility as communicators with the public and the MIT community to ensure that a wide range of perspectives are heard. We strive to continuously improve and expand the diversity of voices represented at our events, in our communications, and on platforms we provide.
- We prioritize building a staff team that can speak from diverse perspectives and are especially interested in hiring individuals from traditionally under-represented groups. We recognize that this involves a thorough reflection on the structures and systems in place within ESI, in addition to MIT, working to address inequitable practices during the hiring process and continuing through to the support of all ESI employees.
- We consciously work to include diverse perspectives on advisory boards, knowing that diverse perspectives and experiences will make our programming stronger.
- More generally, we recognize that our ability to work effectively with the entire community of MIT, and to pursue fruitful partnerships with faculty, students, and departments, labs and centers across the Institute, rests on our welcoming perspectives on our mission and diversity in all forms among our partners.

### C. Communication and Transparency

- We are truthful and transparent about our goals and projects. Our activities are open to peer review and assessment subject to reasonable privacy concerns of our staff, our partners in government, the private sector and civil society. We will not pursue any activity, with or on behalf of a private individual, corporate partner or other type of organization that we cannot proudly share with the public.
- We are truthful and transparent about the sources, types and amounts of our funding support and will provide all information that can be released in accordance with MIT's guidelines and donor/sponsor requests. Anonymous donations are accepted only from individuals that ESI would proudly disclose if given permission. See *Part II: Engagement* for more details on our relations with potential donors.
- We are truthful and transparent in our public communications. We disseminate accurate information to a high standard and communicate activities and results from our engagement activities. We never influence or conceal scientific or policy publications generated by or connected to our activities on behalf of a funder or other partner. In all our activities, we abide by MIT's policies on [open research and free interchange of information](https://policies.mit.edu/policies-procedures/140-research-policies-and-public-and-private-support/142-open-research-and-free)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://policies.mit.edu/policies-procedures/140-research-policies-and-public-and-private-support/142-open-research-and-free>



- We avoid all conflicts of interest, and disclose any potential conflicts of interest that may exist among our staff. We follow MIT's relevant conflict of interest policies for [research](#)<sup>6</sup> and for [licensing, consulting and sponsored research](#)<sup>7</sup>.

#### D. Community

- We are conscious of the inherently multidisciplinary nature of environmental action and actively seek opportunities to work alongside other departments, centers and initiatives at MIT. We publicize synergistic and complementary activities on campus, lend our support to diverse sustainability projects, and avoid creating redundant programs or activities and instead support and join existing efforts. We involve faculty and students from all MIT departments, labs and centers in our activities, including in the awarding of research and curriculum development grants.
- We believe that students enthusiastic about sustainability are among MIT's greatest assets in environmental action, and we aim to foster their ambitions and education in every way we can. It is core to our mission to provide these students with meaningful research opportunities, new educational experiences, and thoughtful career development. Further, our student-focused activities are and must be open to every member of the MIT student body, and we are vigilant and responsive to ways our activities may unintentionally discourage participation.
- We welcome good-faith discussion and debate within the MIT community. All students who, and student groups that, engage in civil discourse and share our goal of advancing a people-centric and planet-positive future are invited to take advantage of our platforms, events and programs to spread their message.

#### E. Environmental Justice

- We recognize that environmental harms tend to fall disproportionately on minority communities and marginalized populations who are often doubly exposed to factors like socio-economic inequality and lack of political representation. We further recognize that environmental solutions, if implemented without attention to their impacts on vulnerable populations, may replicate existing inequalities or create economic challenges for people who cannot afford to bear them. These understandings guide ESI's choices of projects and partnerships as well as their implementation.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://coi.mit.edu/policy>

<sup>7</sup> <https://policies.mit.edu/policies-procedures/40-faculty-rights-and-responsibilities/44-conflict-interest>



- In all our programmatic areas, we consider the ways in which environmental challenges exacerbate existing social inequalities, and seek opportunities to undertake or support research and engagement efforts with an explicit mandate to mitigate those inequalities.
- We hold that the direct participation of affected communities in solving environmental challenges is critical to correctly identifying sources of harm and inequity, choosing appropriate interventions, and achieving lasting results. When pursuing projects with a substantial environmental justice component, we invite members and representatives of communities facing disproportionate harms from environmental challenges to participate in, co-create and influence the direction of our research and engagement efforts.

## Part II: Engagement

### Principles and Definitions

ESI considers supporters of our mission and our enterprise as *partners* in the quest for a sustainable and humane future. Clear misalignments between our mission and the priorities of our partners, or fundamental inconsistencies between our conduct and that of our partners, hold the potential to degrade our integrity and efficacy as an organization as well as corrode the partnership and all our partnerships as we seek to have a positive impact at MIT and beyond. We hold that we cannot pursue our mission with integrity if we do not bring critical scrutiny to all our engagements with individuals and entities both within and beyond MIT.

Engagement includes both the broad set of programmatic activities we pursue with various partners, and all activities directed toward securing funding and other resources to support our mission and the needs of MIT's community. The following is a listing of distinct modes of engagement addressed as part of this set of principles:

1. Hosting guests—individuals and organizations—at events including lectures, seminars, symposia, workshops, conferences and other gatherings;
2. Soliciting and approving membership on ESI's various governing boards<sup>8</sup>;
3. Presenting and representing information and positions related to our mission and enterprise through various media and with diverse platforms including, but not limited to, ESI's online presence<sup>9</sup> and newsletters, talks given by employees of ESI, podcasts and videos, and other;

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<sup>8</sup> Currently, the Faculty Advisory Council, the Student Advisory Committee, the External Advisory Board, the Environment and Sustainability Minor Education Oversight Committee, and the advisory committee for the MIT Climate Portal.

<sup>9</sup> Including online sites and media outlets sponsored by or produced by ESI such as the MIT Climate Portal, the TILClimate podcasts, the Martin Family Society of Fellows for Sustainability, and others.



4. Seeking and/or receiving various types of support including financial and in-kind services and products, human capital, investment positions and all other;
5. Partnering with communities and local institutions to co-create knowledge, acknowledging and advancing different forms of knowledge.

A core assumption of this document is that, if ESI chooses to engage with an entity, this will always entail a bidirectional transfer of value. Through the engagement process, ESI receives certain items of value from a partner (such as direct and indirect financial support, access to specialized knowledge and communities, research collaboration, educational and internship opportunities for students, or the presence of a compelling speaker on campus), and likewise items of value flow from ESI to the partner (such as naming rights, reputational enrichment, applications of MIT research, or access to individuals and knowledge). As a result, ESI has a responsibility not to engage with partners if the transfer of value from ESI to another entity would undermine our mission or our enterprise or the core values of MIT.

### **Practices and Procedures**

ESI engages with a diversity of partners, including government entities, corporations, foundations, non-profit organizations, multilateral organizations, and other groups. Some partners will already be far advanced in adopting sustainable practices and delivering positive social and environmental impacts; others much less so. In some cases, ESI may intentionally partner with groups whose legacies and practices are problematic for the environment explicitly for the purpose of working to shift those entities toward more positive environmental positions, if we are confident in the likelihood of this outcome. Fundamental to this set of principles is the notion that engagement with such partners, especially those offering material support to ESI, must at the very least result in measurable action to improve the sustainability of their practices. At the risk of only achieving a result of doing less bad, we will consistently work toward transformation versus trivial and incremental improvement. For ESI, engagement thus implies working with entities to help them adopt and/or further the most equitable and environmentally conscious practices possible, or to develop synergies that produce positive outcomes for sustainability and environmental justice more broadly.

We periodically measure the beneficial impact of each engagement, and modify or terminate (including early termination) those which are not demonstrating impact objectives.

ESI's principles align with evolving Institute policies and protocols regarding gifts. This includes the working guidelines of the recently established Interim Gift Acceptance Committee (IGAC) and the recommendations and tools stipulated in the [Suri Report](#) and the [Fisher Report](#).

ESI's principles of engagement are organized into three stages roughly corresponding to a chronological sequence for a relationship with a partner from **initial identification and contact ("partner engaged")**, through

transaction and stewardship (“project period”), and generally ending with completion and assessment (“impact and close”).

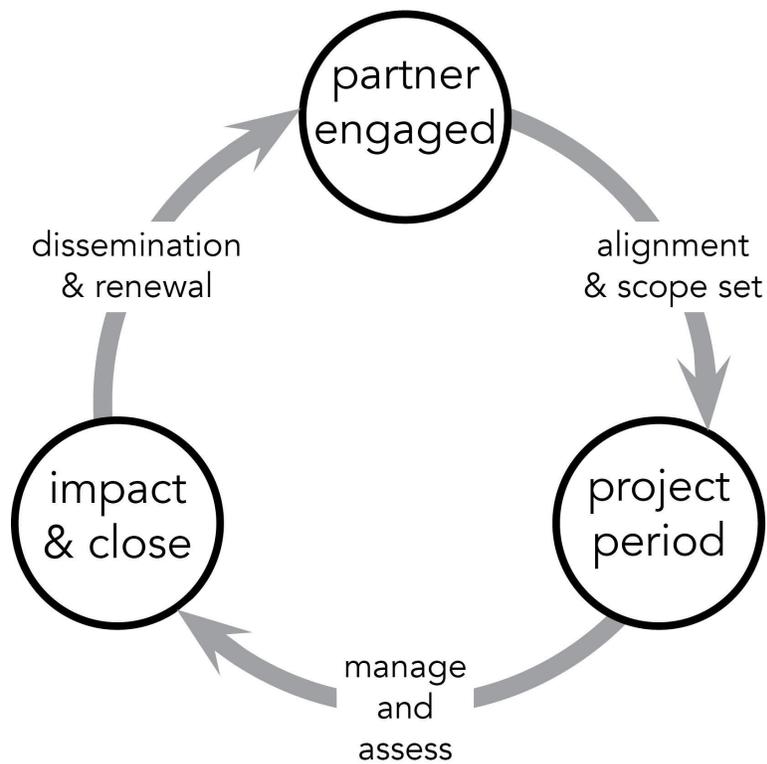


Figure 1: The three stages above – *partner engaged*, *project period*, and *impact & close* - for enlisting a partner and/or donor as a supporting partner are reflected in the three sections of this document. Between the three stages are processes to be implemented between the partner and ESI. Specifics on these processes are not specified in this document.

**A. Initial Identification and Contact (“Partner Engaged”)**

At the outset of identifying and early stages of contact with a prospective partner the following principles will guide our actions and decisions. We seek to engage with individuals who, and organizations and other entities that:

1. share an affiliation with ESI’s mission;
2. share a commitment to advance knowledge and promote actions that repair the relationship between natural systems and human societies;



3. share a commitment to the fundamental transformative benefits that arise from scientific discovery and scientific methods;
4. seek to support research and educational activities;
5. offer diverse perspectives and viewpoints on the relation between the economy, institutions, organizations, human activities generally and the natural environment;
6. seek to promote positive and productive partnerships across government, industry, and civil society;
7. support substantive advances toward equitable and meaningful environmental justice;
8. share a commitment to actively moving towards an environmentally healthy, just, and sustainable world as envisioned within the Paris Agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the 17 Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by all UN member states in 2015 and the Convention on Biological Diversity;
9. adhere, if relevant, to the various measures and guidelines of the United Nations Convention on Corruption and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We will NOT engage with individuals who, and organizations and other entities that:

10. do not support, or act to deny the science of climate change and/or whose stated or unstated goal or mission is to directly or indirectly support the dissemination of misinformation, sow doubt and otherwise engage in ideologically motivated attacks on science, the scientific method and the scientific community;
11. disparage, denigrate or seek to harm directly or indirectly individuals or groups of people;
12. are engaged in climate profiteering, defined for the purposes of this document as the promotion of activities or viewpoints that encourage the acceleration of climate change for the purpose of individual or organizational economic gain;
13. have been convicted of a serious crime and are currently serving out a sentence or sanction;
14. are designated a disqualified donor as determined by the MIT Office of Resource Development;
15. in the face of serious concerns, cannot provide clarity on the origins of the resources from which support to MIT is derived.

## **B. Transaction and Stewardship (“Project Period”)**

As ESI’s partners engage with us on mission and enterprise, various types of transactions transpire. A partner may provide financial support for an activity in research, education, and/or other pursuit. This support typically involves a transfer of funds to MIT and initiates a relationship with ESI and MIT broadly. During the period in which ESI and the partner are engaged, several other direct and indirect transfers may occur including visits to MIT by the sponsor, reports and presentations to the sponsor by the PI and/or ESI, press releases detailing ongoing work and results, announcement of continuing work and more.

Once a partnership has been established, ESI will work to ensure that all projects:

1. respect the independence of all activities undertaken by the MIT community;



2. respect the independence of all research findings and results that are generated by the MIT community;
3. will not seek to limit the dissemination of any findings or results of sponsored work in publication or by other means—in accordance with MIT’s Policies Affecting Research articulated by MIT Research Administrative Services: <https://ras.mit.edu/policies>.
4. respect the independence of all educational materials, pedagogical methods and philosophies, and objectives (teaching and learning) articulated by the MIT community;
5. respect the independence of ESI in engaging with any individual, organization and other entity under guidance provided through this document;
6. allow full disclosure of the relationship with that particular individual, organization or other entity to ESI principals, currently designated as the director and all program directors and managers;
7. contribute, in a substantial, measurable and time-bound way, to improving the environmental behavior and/or activities of the partner and with regard to their impact on local and global environmental challenges as reported out by ESI’s project lead or manager;
8. accept ESI’s process for continuation of the partnership based on an assessment of the good faith effort of the individual, organization or other entity to move towards sustainable practices and mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions and other climate positive actions. A recommendation on continuing or discontinuing a relationship with a partner will be made to the ESI director by the ESI project lead or manager based on an internally conducted annual assessment.

ESI will end a relationship if the partner:

9. is defined by a legacy of environmental damage to the planet without stating an intent to and demonstrating evidence of improving their own practices;
10. demonstrates a sole interest in the reputational benefits of an association with ESI and MIT;
11. demonstrates a primary interest in improving their business prospects without consideration of environmental sustainability, justice, and climate change issues or ESI and MIT’s recommendations;
12. demonstrates a disregard for local laws and cultures;
13. demonstrates a disregard for human rights as articulated by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights;
14. misrepresents the relationship with ESI and MIT.

### **C. Completion and assessment (“Impact and Close”)**

Towards the end of a partnership, and at partnership renewal/extension milestones, the impact of research findings and other results will be the primary focus of the work of ESI. We will work with our partners in maximizing the real-world contribution that a research project, educational program, convening event or any other activity of ESI brings to environmental challenges. We will seek to maximize the impact of the relationship with a partner through various means including aggressive and strategic communications, outreach and direct and targeted



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dissemination. We will seek the advice of our partners in doing so and expect that they will, at the very least, support these efforts, and at best join with us in developing effective and meaningful advocacy.