

**Standards of Public Sociology:
Guidelines for Use by Academic Departments in Personnel Reviews**

**Developed by the Task Force on the Institutionalization of Public Sociology
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These standards are an outcome of work by the Task Force over its first two years. The guidelines reflect both discussion by members of the Task Force and an analysis of a select number of departmental tenure and promotion standards related to support of public sociology. These standards do not reflect any official policy of the American Sociological Association, but should be treated as a working document that can be of value to departments considering revision of tenure and promotion guidelines. The Task Force is continuing its work in collecting existing examples of tenure and promotion that are supportive of public sociology scholarship and provide examples of how to evaluate and reward such scholarship.

The American Sociological Association (ASA) recognizes the longstanding contributions of sociologists to the public's understanding of, and ability to act on, the social issues of our time. The ASA defines work with the express intent of interacting with and for the public as "public sociology." This includes both: a) translational work (the communication of existing sociological research to publics outside of our field), and b) the collaborative production of knowledge (cooperative work with publics in developing and completing new knowledge). It recognizes that such work is the "public face" of the discipline.

The ASA encourages public sociology activities, public sociology research, and the education of future sociologists who will engage in such work. In this context, the ASA Council has established the following standards of public sociology to insure continued rigorous research and professional development. The standards are intended for use by sociology departments as they review departmental academic personnel guidelines, and as they advise colleges and universities on elements of broader university tenure and promotion guidelines that relate to public scholarship.

With the increased attention by the discipline toward the past and present contributions of public sociology, there is a strong need to establish clear standards for evaluating public sociology. In the absence of standards, public sociology is not subject to the routine scrutiny of colleagues and experts in the field. Hence it is the interest of scholars, academic departments, the American Sociological Association, and the publics served that standards for university-based public scholarship be established.

1. Public sociology draws on a body of sociological literature.

The foremost standard of public sociology is that it is grounded in scholarship of a sociological nature. Public sociology entails sharing sociologically-based knowledge with publics outside the academic setting. It may involve the translation of existing sociological theory and research findings for use by broader audiences (e.g. through research reports completed for specific organizations or publication of op-ed columns and other forms of public media commentary). It also may involve the transmission of new research findings--gathered in the academic arena or in cooperation with a research institute (in or outside the academy), a public agency, or other non-academic organizations.

Public sociology also is informed by, and reacts to, the needs of community-based organizations, social movement networks, and a variety of other public agencies. In this case

sociologists collaborate with various publics in the production of new knowledge. This work is critical to the vitality of our field and the understanding of multiple perspectives in understanding and addressing pressing social needs.

2. Public sociology is research-based.

Public sociology is research-based in that it draws on and disseminates: 1) existing knowledge and findings from sociological literature; and/or 2) new research findings based on data gathered and analyzed using professionally-accepted sociological methods. In some cases conceptualization and completion of other facets of research may be done by sociologists in collaboration with non-sociologists. While informed by input of non-sociologists, such research maintains the accepted ASA standards of rigorous research.

3. Public sociology upholds rigorous methodological standards.

High quality public sociology research upholds the same rigorous methodological standards as conventional academic sociology. Sociology is founded upon a tradition of quantitative and qualitative methods. All academic and professional sociologists are trained in these techniques, and the same techniques pertain whether research questions are investigated ultimately for fellow sociologists or the broader public.

Public sociology may expand on traditional research techniques through the use of approaches such as participatory evaluation research or community-based participatory research. Existing published research in sociology serves as a standard for such research. Government research agencies have also provided standards for participatory research techniques.

4. Public sociology is subject to peer review.

In academic settings peer review is the gold standard of evaluation of scholarship. Public sociology should be subject to peer review, just as traditional academic sociology is subject to peer review. The nature of peer review of public sociology may differ. First, peer review of public sociology may be more practical *after* instead of before publication or broadcast. Second, peer review may include both academic and non-academic reviewers qualified to judge the quality and impact of the public sociology products and impacts. As is the case with the use of peer review input in all tenure and promotion processes, the input of these peers is advisory. Departmental, college, and university committees and decision makers use peer review comments to inform their decisions.

a. An Expanded Definition of Peer

Traditional academic peer review requires sharing work with academic peers before and after publication for purposes of tenure and promotion reviews. Other sociologists (and other disciplinary specialists) in academic settings are the peers in this case. For public sociology, peers may also be in settings outside the academy. They may be sociologists working in public policy and other applied settings; they may be members of community groups for which a data collection and analysis effort was undertaken; they may be experienced consumers of public sociology who are not sociologists by training, but who are in positions to use public sociology for policy or organizational ends.

Non-sociologist, non-academic review is appropriate to assess: 1) the effectiveness of collaborative research methods; 2) the impact of sociological research on publics; and/or 3) the

overall professional service to the community or organization. Such review should be used as part of the overall review of candidates' work and in conjunction with traditional criteria and reviewers. As noted above, information provided by peer reviewers is advisory and is intended for use by members of official departmental, college, and university committees governing tenure and promotion decisions.

b. Selecting Peer Reviewers

As is currently the case in most departmental peer reviews, the candidate himself or herself is asked to suggest peer reviewers in addition to those suggested by departmental colleagues. This should continue to be the case in selecting peers under the expanded definition above. In the case where department chairs or tenure and review committees need assistance in identifying peers, the ASA may be able to assist in identifying public sociologists who are appropriate reviewers or who may be able to make recommendations of qualified non-sociologist and non-academic peers.

In judging whether or not a non-sociologist, non-academic reviewer is appropriate, a department can use standards including a reviewer's: 1) educational background or professional training; 2) practical (non-degree related) experience in a particular policy or service area; 3) familiarity with research methodologies associated with public sociology work, e.g. community-based participatory research, participatory action research or participatory evaluation research; or 4) ability to judge impact/potential impact of a candidate's research on the public, a specific organization, and/or a specific community.

5. Review procedures for public sociology that may be considered by departments.

Departments should consider broadened faculty review mechanisms and guidelines to effectively evaluate the full range of sociological research and teaching. These include use of professional portfolios that broaden the range of research outcomes/products that are evaluated. Portfolios may include various public sociology research products, e.g. research reports completed for, and used by, non-academic organizations; evaluation research instruments and outcomes; documentation of involvement in community-based research and educational activities; transcripts of public testimony at government policy hearings; published op-ed columns and other commentary in media outlets; or visual media substantially utilizing a candidate's research. Portfolios should also include clear evidence of impact of the candidate's public sociology activity, e.g. documentation that a report was used to expand an organization's services to more clients or community members; readership/viewership of op-ed publications; or evidence that a report improved the quality of life in a specific community. In the cases of participatory research, non-academic participants should be invited to provide input as to the effectiveness of the candidate's contributions to their organization or community; these documents should be as detailed and precise as possible in communicating the quantitative and qualitative indicators of research impact.

Peer reviewers (drawn from both inside and outside academia as noted above) should be used to evaluate elements of the portfolio. Such reviewers should provide specific and precise feedback to the department regarding the impact of the candidate's public sociology work. Such reviewers function to verify that the public sociologist's impact is what he/she says it is.

6. How to make distinctions between proprietary work and public sociology

Departmental reviewers must determine whether or not proprietary work can be included as part of a candidate's public sociology portfolio. In the case where reviewers cannot review both research and research outcomes, e.g. an evaluation or marketing report completed under a "do-not-publish" or "no-share" proprietary agreement with an organization, proprietary research is not appropriate for inclusion in a tenure and promotion portfolio. In cases where all or part of the data, research instruments, and/or outcomes can be reviewed (albeit with some locational or respondent data identifiers suppressed for confidentiality purposes) such research is appropriate in the review of public scholarship.

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