



NAR passes ethics changes to crack down on social media harassment

The trade organization said on Friday that the changes will 'raise the bar on the professionalism and private speech of America's 1.4 million Realtors'

BY [ANDREA V. BRAMBILA](#)

Nov. 13, 2020

After an annual conference [heavily focused](#) on [fair housing](#), the [National Association of Realtors](#) on Friday passed controversial [changes to its professional standards](#) to crack down on racist and [discriminatory speech and behavior](#).

NAR's 959-member board of directors on Friday approved changes that apply [NAR's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice](#) to all of a Realtor's activities, not just those related to real estate; prohibit hate and harassing speech against protected classes; prohibit all discrimination, not just willful discrimination, against protected classes; and recommend that ethics violations be considered under membership qualification criteria.

The changes also reiterate that the association can refer ethics violations to governmental agencies and offer specific guidance for hearing panels regarding violations that would consider discrimination "particularly egregious" when determining appropriate discipline and add termination of membership for up to three years as a possible disciplinary action.

One of the policies that was approved, Standard of Practice 10-5, reads as follows: "Realtors must not use harassing speech, hate speech, epithets, or slurs based on race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity." A Realtor that violates the policy would be charged under Article 10 of the Code of Ethics, which prohibits denying equal professional services to anyone in those protected classes.

The policy is effective immediately.

"I applaud NAR's Board of Directors and our Professional Standards Committee for their efforts to raise the bar on the professionalism and private speech of America's 1.4 million Realtors," said NAR President Vince Malta in a [statement](#).

"Combatting and overcoming bigotry and injustice starts with each of us. Realtors today took tangible steps to ensure we are held to the highest possible standard while providing a mechanism of enforcement for those who violate our new policies."

The trade group said its Professional Standards Committee, which put forward the policy changes, will continue working to develop case interpretations to assist members and professional standards enforcement volunteers in understanding the code's applicability.

Before the board meeting, the changes [proved controversial](#) due to their potential subjectivity and what some saw as overreach, but after receiving complaints of [racist](#) and [other discriminatory behavior](#) on social media, trade group leaders insisted that to be a [Realtor by day and a "keyboard bigot" by night](#) was unacceptable.

"When one Realtor posts discriminatory speech or conduct online, that content becomes reflective of Realtors on the whole. Left unchecked, those statements become who we are as an organization, and further reinforce the barriers to homeownership experienced by so many Americans. These recommendations are one very impactful way we can advance equity and fairness in the real estate industry, and ensure access to the American Dream for all," the Professional Standards Committee said in an [FAQ](#).

Panelists at Inman Connect Now on Thursday expressed reservations about the changes, but ultimately they said the trade group should [pull the trigger](#) and tweak them afterward as the need arises.

The board already made one change at the recommendation of NAR's Executive Committee. That change would require member associations "to share with the state real estate licensing authority final ethics decisions holding Realtors in violation of the Code of Ethics in instances **involving real estate-related activities and transactions** where there is reason to believe the public trust may have been violated."

Adding that the violation must involve real estate-related activities addresses a concern that a regulatory agency would otherwise be "asked to act on personal, ethical matters which may be beyond the scope of license law," according to the committee.

The board of directors meeting, originally scheduled from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Central, ran some two hours over its scheduled time. Inman asked whether debate on particular policy changes prompted the delay and asked for a vote count on the ethics changes but NAR spokesperson Mantill Williams said, "It is our policy not to share vote counts and specifics about our debate process."

All items put before the board passed as presented, he added.