

Important Information for Public Interest Section Members – Please Read!

Dear Public Interest Section Colleagues.

I hope you are doing well and enjoying the summer. I am writing to inform you of an exciting development within the Public Interest Section. After careful consideration and extensive discussions, the leadership team has proposed changing our Section's name from the Public Interest Section to the Public Interest, Ethics, and Sustainability Section. This proposed name change was made to the AAA Board of Directors at its May meeting and received Board approval, subject to Section member approval. The rationale for this change and the procedures for Section approval are provided below.

Public Interest Section Name Change – Why?

The Public Interest section has, for many years, welcomed research and teaching about ethics and sustainability as part of its core objectives. The purpose of this proposed name change is to formally recognize the importance of both ethics and sustainability to the public good and broaden the name of the section to reflect the interests of our members.

Background Information

The present Public Interest Section's Current Mission and Vision Statement is provided below. This is followed by the Proposed Mission Statement of the Public Interest, Ethics, and Sustainability Section, the Proposed Vision Statement, and the Justification for this Section Name Change.

Current Public Interest Section Mission and Vision Statement

The Public Interest Section of the American Accounting Association is committed to promoting knowledge and the exchange of ideas related to the effects of accounting information and the accounting profession on the public good, as well as the social and ethical responsibilities of accountants in the business world. Our members are active in the areas where accountants and accounting information influence the quality of our society and common life such as:

- corporate social responsibility and sustainability reporting;
- professional and business ethics;
- societal welfare;
- governmental regulation; and
- social justice

Proposed Mission Statement of the Public Interest, Ethics, and Sustainability Section

The American Accounting Association Public Interest, Ethics, and Sustainability Section is committed to advancing the role of accounting in promoting the public trust, ethical behavior, and sustainable practices. We support the teaching of best practices, the dissemination of knowledge, rigorous academic research, and approaches that align accounting with the broader societal goals of professional ethics, accountability, corporate social responsibility, and environmental stewardship.

Proposed Vision Statement

Our vision is to be the leading organization for integrating public interest, ethics, and sustainability concepts into accounting education and research. We strive to inspire and support accounting academics and professionals to contribute significantly to ethical behavior, socially responsible decisions, and sustainable development, reporting, and actions, ensuring that the accounting academy and profession serves the long-term interests of society.

Justification for the Section Name Change

The proposed name change to the American Accounting Association (AAA) Public Interest, Ethics, and Sustainability Section reflects a better identification of the roles the Public Interest Section has played both for decades and more recently. The Public Interest Section has served as a "Big Tent" section within the AAA, with many different topics addressed at Annual Meetings, Midyear Meetings, and Ethics Symposiums. These include accountability, ethics education, professional ethics, social costs, corporate social responsibility (CSR), government regulation and policy development, company management, environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues, earnings management, behavioral ethics, workplace and financial statement fraud, whistleblowing, and critical perspectives. Public interest-oriented research associated with financial accounting and reporting, taxation, forensic accounting, government and nonprofit accounting, and management accounting has also been presented at various Public Interest Section conferences and symposiums. We believe that by broadening the name of the Section, we will be better able to encourage academics and professionals involved in these fields to join our Section.

By incorporating ethics and sustainability into the title of our Section, we recognize the critical role that accountants play in promoting ethical conduct and accountability. We expect this change will help increase interest in these topics in the AAA. In doing so, we think it will enable us to better support research, education, and practices that support ethical behavior and sustainable development, positively contributing to the public interest.

These topics are not new to the Public Interest section. Our section has sponsored or co-sponsored the Annual Ethics Research Symposium for over 25 years, serving as a focal point for those involved in the teaching and research of accounting ethics, addressing such topics as

effective instructional approaches, accountability, codes of conduct, compliance, corporate governance, fraud, and whistleblowing.

The Public Interest Section also sponsors the Accounting Exemplar Award, which is awarded to an individual who has made notable contributions to professionalism and ethics in accounting education and/or practice. This prestigious award has been presented to 30 distinguished educators, practitioners, and regulators in the past, including Arthur Levitt, Bob Sack, Lynn Turner, Stephen Loeb, Steven Mintz, and Cynthia Cooper.

Similarly, the Public Interest Section has long served as an outlet for those involved in sustainability-related topics, including corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues. Traditionally, CSR and ESG topics have been presented in Public Interest Section meetings and conferences. For example, at the 2023 Annual Meeting, the Public Interest sponsored concurrent sessions and co-sponsored an At-Large Panel ESG Track that included the following session titles:

Corporate CSR Activity

Ideas for Integrating ESG into Introductory Accounting Courses

ESG – GRI Panel

The Intersection of Sustainability and Accounting Views from the Field

ESG – EY Cases

The Power of STEM in Accounting Education – Improving Outcomes and Increasing Enrollments

Using the First Accounting Course to Grab the Attention of Potential Accounting Majors

Practitioners' Perceptions of ESG for Non-Public Entities

It is also worth noting that six of the 18 papers to be presented at the 28th Annual Ethics Symposium in August of 2024 are on ESG related topics.

The Public Interest Section has supported the AAA taking the lead on the 2023 and 2024 Sustainability, ESG, and Accounting Conferences. The respective 2023 and 2024 Public Interest Section Chairs participated in the Planning Committees for those two very successful Conferences. Our Section looks forward to playing an active role in future Sustainability, ESG, and Accounting Conferences.

Since the Public Interest Section has always been a “Big Tent” section as noted above, we think this name change will help grow membership, involvement, and participation in both our Section and the AAA.

We are required to post the notice of our Section name change for 30 days. Therefore, voting for the Section name change will open in early August just before the Annual meeting and will

remain open until September 30th. Voting instructions will be sent out to PI Section members once voting is open so you can cast your vote. We will also be discussing this name change at the Annual Meeting and look forward to answering any questions from our Section members.

Please direct any immediate questions to the Public Interest Section Chair, Pat Kelly, at pkelly@providence.edu. Thank you.

Pat Kelly,
Chair, PI Section