

IEEE Guide to Information Classification and Disclosure

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This IEEE Guide to Information Classification and Disclosure (Guide) provides direction for the implementation of IEEE Policies, Section 9.25 Information Disclosure Policy. This guide assumes familiarity with this policy. The guidance is applicable to all members of the IEEE community, including IEEE Staff, subcontractors and volunteer leaders. This Guide does not and is not intended to supersede the provisions of IEEE Policies, Section 12.8 IEEE Records Management Policy Statement and the related IEEE Records Management Program.

The initial version of this Guide was approved in June 2015 by the IEEE Board of Directors and revised in October 2019 and April 2023.

Preface

The Guide shall be maintained by the IEEE Governance Committee who shall 1) report appropriate amendments to the Guide to the IEEE Board of Directors, and 2) report any issues with compliance to this policy and the procedures contained in the Guide at least annually.

IEEE Policies, Section 9.25 and the supporting guide shall apply to all IEEE Organizational Units; the creation of OU specific policies or classifications, beyond those described here or in the Guide, is not permitted.

The Guide shall be made accessible on the IEEE Website at <http://www.ieee.org/about/corporate/governance/index.html> (IEEE Policies, Section 9.25 - Information Disclosure Policy)

Any comments on this document or suggestions for improvement should be submitted to the Governance Committee of the IEEE Board of Directors at info-disclosure@ieee.org.

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1. Key Information

1.1 Purpose

IEEE Policy 9.25.1 states that:

As an educational, scientific and charitable organization dedicated to the benefit of the public, IEEE recognizes and endorses the fundamental importance of transparency and accountability in all its activities. Accordingly, it is IEEE's policy to be open about its activities and to welcome and seek out opportunities to explain its work to the widest possible audience.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on the application of IEEE's policy on information disclosure. Accordingly, much of IEEE's information should be available to the public and nearly all of it should be available to its members.

Procedures for information disclosure are appropriate to deal with the small fraction of information that should receive a more restricted distribution. A quick reference summary of concepts and procedures is at the end of this guide.

1.2 Objectives

IEEE's information disclosure policy has two objectives:

- To increase the flow of information among volunteers and IEEE staff.
- To protect the small amount of information that requires protection.

It follows from these objectives that the procedures should give everyone—both volunteers and IEEE staff—the information that they need to discharge their duties; reduce the need for and use of executive sessions and comply with any applicable laws.

An information disclosure policy necessarily exists between two needs:

- Should the information be disclosed to provide benefit to the public, to fulfill the members' right to know, and to provide the information needed for everyone to do their jobs?
- Should the information be protected to preserve competitive advantages, to fulfill legal obligations, and to protect privacy?

Every person in the IEEE community needs to be mindful of both sets of needs and apply judgment to find the right balance. This document is intended to provide assistance in making those informed decisions.

1.3 Scope and Limits

These procedures apply to all information created and maintained by IEEE and its organizational units (OU), with the exception of privileged information created by attorneys or in correspondence with attorneys. Any privilege markings provided in the course of correspondence with legal counsel preempt any markings provided by this set of procedures.

1.4 Key Terms

1.4.1. Document

A “document” is any written, printed, or electronically stored information that can be read, viewed or heard [listened to], by a human, regardless of whether the information is stored on social media accounts, chats, instant messages, or contained in collaborative work environments and other databases. Databases are not necessarily documents, but the reports and information retrieved from a database are documents. For purposes of this Policy, video and audio recordings are considered documents.

1.4.2. Authorized Volunteer Leader (AVL)

An Authorized Volunteer Leader is an IEEE volunteer who has undergone the appropriate procedures (as described in IEEE Policies, Section 9.25 - Information Disclosure Policy) to be entrusted with IEEE confidential information and who has a fiduciary duty to act in the best interests of IEEE. For the purposes of this Guide, AVLs and IEEE staff have the same privileges and responsibilities in dealing with IEEE’s information. *See Section 8, Authorized Volunteer Leader (AVLs), for more information.*

1.4.3. Classification

Classification is used on documents to indicate the nature of the content and the audience that may have access to the document. Not all documents are required to have a classification. As noted earlier in this document, IEEE has two levels of classification: IEEE Proprietary and IEEE Confidential. Some information is subject to stricter controls on distribution, such information is marked as IEEE Confidential—Controlled Distribution.

1.4.4. Need-to-Know

The principle of “need-to-know” forms the foundation for sharing confidential information within the IEEE community. Need-to-know means that individuals share information only with those other individuals who are authorized and who have a legitimate operational or business need-to-know. If AVLs or IEEE staff members need the information in a document in order to perform their duties, then they have a “need-to-know”.

In the case of “IEEE Confidential” documents, the need-to-know is determined by the person already in possession of the document.

In the case of documents marked “IEEE Confidential—Controlled Distribution”, the need-to-know is determined by the originator of the document. Before such a document can be shared, the originator shall add recipients to a distribution list. (*See Section 2, Protecting and Sharing Classified Information, for additional information*).

1.4.5. Originators and Possessors

The “originator” of a classified document is the person who created the document. In some cases it may be the successor in the position of the person who created the document. If it is a team effort, then the originator might be the lead person of the team. The originator selects the appropriate classification level, and, in the case of “IEEE Confidential— Controlled Distribution”, determines and maintains the list of people who may have access to the document.

The “possessor” is anyone who has access to a classified document. In the case of documents marked “IEEE Confidential”, the possessor may share the document with an AVL or IEEE staff if the possessor determines that they have a “need-to-know”.

1.4.6. Records Retention

In addition to its policy on Information Disclosure, IEEE also has a policy on records retention. The two are distinct—Records Retention regulates the preservation of documents while Information Disclosure regulates the sharing of the information in those documents. Nothing in this Guide supersedes the requirements of IEEE Policies, Section 12.8 IEEE Records Management Policy Statement.

2. Protecting and Sharing Classified Information

Every person in the IEEE community has the responsibility to protect classified documents that are in their custody. This section describes the requirements.

Unclassified

- may be shared with members, IEEE staff, and non-members.
- may be shared in open meetings.
- the document has no markings of classification.

IEEE Proprietary documents

- may be shared with any IEEE member or IEEE staff.
- shall not be left unattended in public places.
- require no special protection aside from reasonable care.
- can be discussed at meetings if the meeting chair takes reasonable precautions to ensure that no non-members are present.

IEEE Confidential documents

- *may be shared with any Authorized Volunteer Leader or IEEE staff if they have a need-to-know.* To share with others, it must be determined if the receiver:
 - is, in fact, IEEE staff or an Authorized Volunteer Leader.
 - has a need-to-know the information in order to conduct their duties and responsibilities.
- shall be in the physical possession of the responsible individual when in active use.
- shall be stored in a locked container when not in active use.
- when traveling, IEEE Confidential documents shall be secured in a manner similar to a valuable object, e.g., out of sight in a locked automobile, locked briefcase, hotel safe, etc.
- when mailed, shall be via a method that provides delivery tracking confirmation.
- when emailed, should be via an IEEE email address to another IEEE email address.

IEEE Confidential—Controlled Distribution documents

- may be shared only with those who appear on the distribution list and with members of the IEEE Board of Directors who are not known to have a conflict of interest.
- to share with others not on the distribution list, one shall seek the agreement of the originator or the originator's superior to modify the distribution list.
- when mailed, shall be via a method that provides delivery tracking confirmation.
- when storing on an electronic device or transmitted electronically and, where available, encryption shall be applied, except when in actual use.

Documents labeled IEEE Proprietary, Confidential, or Confidential-Controlled Distribution may be disclosed to individuals outside IEEE only after IEEE staff has executed a non-disclosure agreement with the party outside of IEEE.

3. Handling Classified Documents in Meetings

This section describes the treatment of classified information in meetings. In particular, it addresses the use of executive sessions.

Unless otherwise designated, IEEE meetings are open to IEEE members and staff, as well as the general public. Unclassified materials may be discussed at such meetings. IEEE Proprietary documents should not be discussed in open meetings unless the meeting chair takes reasonable precautions to ensure that no non-members are present. A non-member may remain in the room for an item in which the non-member has a “need-to-know” only after the non-member has executed an IEEE non-disclosure agreement.

To consider documents classified IEEE Confidential or above, it *may* be advisable to enter an executive session. The chair, subject to the will of the body, normally controls attendance in executive sessions. In the normal course of business, items are designated for executive session by adoption of the agenda. However, this can be changed during the meeting by majority vote or by general consent.

An executive session to consider IEEE Confidential (not Controlled Distribution) documents could have a liberal rule regarding attendance. For example, all IEEE staff and AVLs might be allowed to remain in the room.

A topic might be described in both a Proprietary document and a Confidential supplement to enable some consideration of an issue in open session. If more in-depth consideration is needed, further discussion can proceed in executive session.

The minutes of an executive session are inherently IEEE Confidential—Controlled Distribution. It may be desirable, though, to distribute results from an executive session, based upon whatever actions were taken. In that case, possible actions for this situation include:

- The executive session itself may determine that its minutes are to be classified at some other level. This could be done during the executive session itself or during the executive session that approves the minutes of a previous executive session.
- The body, in general session or executive session, could delegate to a committee the responsibility for preparing “sanitized” minutes that could be classified at a lower level.
- The body, in general session or executive session, could delegate to a committee the responsibility for preparing a report of the executive session that could be classified at a lower level.
- The body may, during its executive session, decide to report out of executive session in general session decisions and other information appropriate for wider distribution.

If an executive session is convened to consider an IEEE Confidential document, the minutes of the executive session are Controlled Distribution, but the original document retains its Confidential classification. The classification of a document is *not* increased merely because it was considered during executive session. Furthermore, if the executive session results in the creation or modification of a document, the normal guidelines for classification still apply. The minutes are the only product of an executive session that are inherently Controlled Distribution.

4. Disposing of Classified Documents

Volunteers and IEEE staff are encouraged to routinely dispose of obsolete documents in accordance with IEEE's Records Management Policy. However, disposal of classified documents may require some additional care.

IEEE Proprietary documents

- Electronic documents may be deleted in the usual manner
- Paper documents should be either shredded, destroyed, or placed in containers designated for secure disposal.

IEEE Confidential documents

- Electronic documents should be deleted in a manner that prevents easy recovery of the document.
- Paper documents should be either shredded, destroyed or placed in containers designated for secure disposal.

IEEE Confidential—Controlled Distribution

- Electronic documents should be deleted in a manner that prevents easy recovery of the document.
- Paper documents can be disposed of in one of two manners
 - return the document to the originator. (providing evidence that the document was not passed on to others)
 - shred, destroy, or place in a secure disposal container.

5. Reclassifying Documents

The originator of any document classified as IEEE Confidential or above is encouraged to include a date for reclassification to Proprietary¹ and depending on the content would normally be suitable for reclassification after one year.

The IEEE Board of Directors or top deliberative body of any OU may reclassify a document that originated within their purview. (In such cases, it may be appropriate to designate a representative of the Board as the “originator” of the reclassified document.)

In some cases, there may be disputes regarding the appropriate classification of a document. Such disputes are to be resolved by the Governance Committee. The Governance Committee and the Board of Directors shall be provided access to any classified documents for the purpose of resolving any disputes regarding the appropriate level of classification.

The Governance Committee may, at its discretion, propose that the Board of Directors consider reclassifying any document.

¹ There are some exceptions (*described in Section 7.6, Personnel Data*) for personnel and governance documents that are the subject of legal regulation. Such documents are never lowered in classification, but are instead destroyed when no longer useful. (Note that the IEEE Policy on Records Retention may require that an archival copy be retained for legal purposes.)

6. Creating Classified Documents

The selection of an appropriate classification level for a document is an important decision. Selecting a level that is too high has the effect of withholding important information from volunteers and IEEE staff who need it. Selecting a level that is too low may inadequately protect IEEE's important intellectual assets. The next chapter of this Guide provides guidance in selecting a level. Because the decision is an important one, originators may wish to consult with others before selecting a level.

Experience suggests that many documents primarily consist of a large amount of information at one classification level and a small amount of information at a higher level. In such cases, create a document that contains the lower level information and a distinct annex—a *separate document*—that contains the more highly classified information. This allows the majority of the information to be shared more freely. This practice also permits the use of labor-saving word-processing techniques, such as headers and footers, to apply the classification label to each page.

If necessary, a document containing pages with different levels of classification, each page should be labeled with the classification appropriate for its content. But the title or cover page of the document shall reflect the highest level classification of any material in the document. IEEE presentation templates may be downloaded from iee.org.

If the document is classified IEEE Confidential or above, the cover page should include a date on which the classification will be lowered to IEEE Proprietary. Normally this should be one year from the date of creation.

If the document is classified IEEE Confidential—Controlled Distribution, it shall include an authorized distribution list. The distribution list does not necessarily consist solely of persons' names. It might include the names of positions, e.g., "Members of Products and Services Committee."

Sample Classification Markings:



Classification of Documents

*Neelhtak Remark
IEEE Governance Committee
5 April 2023*

ieee.org



IEEE Proprietary

IEEE Proprietary - for IEEE members and IEEE staff



IEEE Brand Strategies

*Charles G. Dolittle
IEEE Board of Directors
15 April 2023*

ieee.org



IEEE Confidential (Classification Expires on: 15 April 2024)

IEEE Confidential - may be distributed to Authorized Volunteer Leaders and IEEE Staff

Classification Expires on <insert date>



Executive Compensation

Charles G. Dolittle
IEEE Board of Directors
15 April 2023

IEEE Confidential – Controlled Distribution (Classification Expires on: 1 November 2023)
Distribution list: IEEE Board of Directors

iee.org



IEEE
Advancing Technology
for Humanity

IEEE Confidential – Controlled Distribution (Classification Expires on: 1 November 2023)

IEEE Confidential - Controlled Distribution
<insert list of individuals and/or position titles>
Classification Expires on <insert date>

7. Assigning Classification

In determining the classification of a document, one needs to make two decisions:

- What level of classification is appropriate?
- What should be the period of time until the classification expires?

This section provides guidance in making both of those decisions. The examples are simply the types of documents that might be considered for classification. Minutes from some types of meetings, for example, may need to be classified, while many more may not. This classification guide rests on human judgment, not simply a document name.

7.1. Product Data

Examples of product data include the following:

A document containing this type of data...	... might be classified at this level for this duration.	Notes
Non-negotiable prices, terms and conditions	Unclassified	Not applicable.	
Negotiable Prices, Terms and Conditions	IEEE Confidential—Controlled Distribution	The effective period plus one year.	
Internal documents developing prices, terms, and conditions	IEEE Confidential	The date of the data plus two years.	
Market Share	IEEE Confidential	The date of the data plus two years.	Some market share information may merit higher classification.
Competitive Intelligence	IEEE Confidential	The date of the data plus two years.	Some competitive intelligence may merit higher classification.
Product R&D plans and results	IEEE Confidential	The expected period of utility.	Consult IEEE Legal.

A document containing this type of data...	... might be classified at this level for this duration.	Notes
Trade secrets	IEEE Confidential— Controlled Distribution	The expected period of utility.	Consult IEEE Legal.
Product Evolution Strategies	IEEE Confidential	The period of the strategy plus two years.	
New Business Proposals	IEEE Confidential	The anticipated commencement of the new business plus two years.	
Product Business Cases (forecast and actual revenue, expenses, margins)	IEEE Confidential	The period of the plan plus two years.	
Sales Analysis and Territory Reviews	IEEE Confidential— Controlled Distribution	The period studied by the analysis or review plus two years.	This is classified highly because it is related to compensation. When that consideration does not apply, the appropriate classification is Confidential.
Discussions of Potential Product Policy Changes (e.g., conference and authors' fees)	IEEE Confidential	The intended date of implementation plus two years.	

7.2. Operations Data

Examples of operations data include the following:

A document containing this type of data...	... might be classified at this level for this duration.	Notes
Annual report	Unclassified	Not applicable.	
Financial budget and performance data (except for individual compensation)	IEEE Proprietary or IEEE Confidential based on operational needs including when such information may be used by an IEEE competitor	The period of the plan plus two years.	
Organization charts and lists	IEEE Proprietary	The period of the data plus two years.	
IEL (and other product) activity measures	IEEE Confidential	The period of time measured plus two years.	
Information from other parties held in trust	IEEE Confidential	The period of time agreed when accepting the information.	In some cases, a higher classification may be appropriate.
Operations goals	IEEE Proprietary	Annual	In some cases, a higher classification may be appropriate.
Executive performance plans	IEEE Confidential—Controlled Distribution	The period of time plus two years.	

7.3. Strategic Data

Examples of strategic data include the following:

A document containing this type of data...	... might be classified at this level for this duration.	Notes
OU and Brand strategies	IEEE Confidential	The period of the plan plus two years.	
Data of other organizations held under an NDA	IEEE Confidential unless otherwise specified by the NDA	The period of time agreed when accepting the data.	In some cases, a higher classification may be appropriate.

7.4. Data regarding Relationships with Other Organizations

Examples of this data include the following:

A document containing this type of data...	... might be classified at this level For this duration.	Notes
Executed Contracts	IEEE Confidential unless otherwise specified in an NDA or contractual provision	For the term of the agreement and a period no less than two years from the date of last transaction.	Consult IEEE Legal.
Partnership and alliance proposals (e.g., memorandum of understanding (MOU)).	IEEE Confidential	Consult IEEE Legal.	
Mergers, acquisitions and other corporate restructurings	IEEE Confidential—Controlled Distribution	Consult IEEE Legal.	

7.5. Governance Data

Examples of governance data include the following:

A document containing this type of data...	... might be classified at this level For this duration.	Notes
All except as noted below	IEEE Proprietary	The period of the data plus two years.	
Names of Members of the Board and OU leaders	Unclassified	Not applicable.	
Documents cleared for public release	Unclassified	Not applicable.	
Minutes of meetings (except for executive session)	IEEE Proprietary	Varies.	
Minutes of executive session (unless reclassified)	IEEE Confidential—Controlled Distribution	Indefinite.	Bylaw I-300 1. Meeting Protocol (... <i>members of the Board of Directors shall be granted access to the approved minutes of executive sessions of any organizational unit board, committee or council.</i> *See implementation note below.
Secret ballots	Not applicable	Not applicable.	These should be destroyed immediately after certification.
Consideration of candidates for awards and offices	IEEE Confidential—Controlled Distribution	Indefinite.	*See implementation note below.
Information where distribution is regulated by law	IEEE Confidential—Controlled Distribution	In accordance with law.	Consult IEEE Legal.

7.6. Personnel Data

Personnel data is generally held in databases that are protected in accordance with legal requirements. This section concerns reports produced from those databases as well as personnel-related documents utilized in the everyday course of doing business.

Note that the disclosure of personnel data by Human Resources is a distinct issue. This discussion concerns only the use of personnel-related reports and documents by others.

Examples of governance data include the following:

A document containing this type of data...	... might be classified at this level for this duration.	Notes
IEEE staff name, title; business address, email addresses, and phone numbers	Unclassified	Not applicable.	This is intended for the situation of business cards and signature blocks on correspondence.
Position descriptions	IEEE Proprietary	Consult with HR.	HR may choose to treat some as unclassified, e.g., when advertising a position.
Statistical abstractions and summaries of HR data	IEEE Proprietary	Consult with HR.	For example, individual salaries are highly classified; average salaries for large groups of IEEE staff are not.
Personal and emergency contact information	IEEE Confidential	Indefinite. *See implementation note below.	This is the sort of information typically gathered by a department administrative assistant.

A document containing this type of data...	... might be classified at this level for this duration.	Notes
Substantial compilations of proprietary HR data	IEEE Confidential	Indefinite. *See implementation note below.	For example, it's OK to publicly disclose that an individual works at IEEE. It's not OK to publish a substantial list of IEEE staff.
Compensation (aside from the legal requirements of IRS Form 990)	IEEE Confidential—Controlled Distribution	Indefinite. *See implementation note below.	

*Implementation note: Holders of such documents should securely dispose of them when their useful period has passed.

7.7. Legal Data

Markings provided by counsel and those corresponding with counsel preempt any other markings. Guidance on dealing with such documents should be obtained from IEEE Legal and Compliance Department.

7.8. Personal Data and Privacy

IEEE has specific privacy policy and business processes that govern how the organization collects, uses, shares and retains the personal data of members, customers, volunteers, and IEEE staff worldwide. Such processes must be applied and nothing in this Guide is meant to supersede or conflict with them.

8. Authorized Volunteer Leaders (AVLs)

An IEEE member becomes an Authorized Volunteer Leader (AVL) on assuming an appointed or elected volunteer position with a need-to-know and by completing an online training course and acknowledging an understanding of the appropriate handling of IEEE information. Such acknowledgement applies to the individual for a three-year period at which time a refresher online training course will be required, provided the individual remains an active volunteer and continues to have a need-to-know.

A list of AVLs will be made available so that it may be consulted prior to sharing information.

Becoming an AVL is a requirement for many volunteer leadership positions. The current list includes individuals serving on the following Boards and Committees or holding the positions as provided below:

- IEEE Board of Directors (BoD)
- IEEE Director-Elects
- Major Boards (Educational Activities Board, Member and Geographic Activities Board, IEEE-USA Board, IEEE Standards Association Board, Publication Services and Products Board, Technical Activities Board)
- Chairs and members of Committees of IEEE
- Chairs and members of Committees of IEEE Major Boards, as applicable
- Conference General Chairs and Treasurers (Financial Interest)
- Annual Election Candidates
- Editors-in-Chief
- Section Chairs
- Region and Section Treasurers
- Society and Council Treasurers
- All other positions, boards, or committees designated by OUs

Any changes to this list shall be reported to the IEEE Legal and Compliance Department.

9. Use Within Organizational Units

The Information Disclosure Policy and procedures implementing that policy apply to all of IEEE. Organizational units of IEEE are not permitted to create their own policies and/or markings. The standard practice of OUs shall be in accordance with this Guide. The terms “Confidential” and “Proprietary” may not be extended to similar organization-specific markings. For example, it is not permissible to mark an item as “Shiny Toys Society Confidential”.

Nevertheless, it is understood and expected that situations arise where IEEE societies or OUs may be engaged in a friendly competition or wish to operate with some level of privacy. In such cases, one might put a marking on a document that says, “Please keep this within the Shiny Toys Society”. Such a label results only in a request and would have no legal basis for enforcement.

10. Quick Reference Summary of Concepts and Procedures

The following table summarizes information found elsewhere in this document:

	Unclassified	IEEE Proprietary	IEEE Confidential	IEEE Confidential-Controlled Distribution
Frequency of use	The norm	Common	Infrequent	Rare
Characterization	IEEE products, public communication, and records of volunteer activities		Information that adversely affect the business operations, privacy commitments, or legal obligations of IEEE if disclosed	Information that, in accordance withlaw, bylaws, policies, or procedures shallbe restricted to a defined list of individuals
Availability	Available to the non-member —may be subject to copyright, fees, etc.	Available to all IEEE staff and members	Available to all IEEE staff and Authorized Volunteer Leaders with a need-to-know	Availability limited to those on the distribution list. May not be redistributed.
Examples (See § 7)	Business cards, products, publications, price lists, annual report	Organization charts, financial data, statistical abstractions of higher-classified data	R&D plans, product strategies, consideration of policy changes, compilations of lower-classified data	Most personnel information, negotiable prices and terms, trade secrets and patents, executive session minutes, mergers, acquisitions, and other corporate restructurings

	Unclassified	IEEE Proprietary	IEEE Confidential	IEEE Confidential- Controlled Distribution
Need-to-know is determined by (See § 1.4.4)	Not applicable	Possessor	Possessor	Distribution list provided by Originator

	Unclassified	IEEE Proprietary	IEEE Confidential	IEEE Confidential-Controlled Distribution
Frequency of use	The norm	Common	Infrequent	Rare
Classification markings (See § 6)	Not applicable	Classification Level, Originator	Classification Level, Originator	Classification Level, Originator, Distribution list
Protection (See § 2)	Not applicable	Reasonable care	Locked drawer, restricted access, delivery tracking, use of IEEE Email address.	Locked drawer, encryption, delivery receipt and tracking, use of IEEE Email address.
Disposal*(See § 4)	Not applicable	Normal deletion from computer. Paper: shred, destroy or dispose in designated container.	Paper: shred, destroy or dispose in designated container. Electronic: secure deletion.	Paper: return to originator, shred, destroy or dispose in designated container. Electronic: secure deletion.
Meeting audience(See § 3)	Not applicable	IEEE members and IEEE staff	Executive session e.g., AVL, volunteer leaders).	Executive session consistent with the stated Controlled Distribution