Disruption and Harms in
Online Gaming Framework

Creating and Maintaining Community Guidelines for Online Games and Platforms

FAIR PLAY ALLIANCE

ADL
FIGHTING HATE FOR GOOD

ADL Center for Technology & Society

In a world riddled with cyberhate, online harassment and misuses of technology, the Center for Technology & Society (CTS) serves as a resource to tech platforms and develops proactive solutions. Launched in 2017 and headquartered in Silicon Valley, CTS aims for global impacts and applications in an increasingly borderless space.

It is a force for innovation, producing cutting-edge research to enable online civility, protect vulnerable populations, support digital citizenship and engage youth. CTS builds on ADL's experience over more than a century building a world without hate and supplies the tools to make that a possibility both online and offline.

Fair Play Alliance

The Fair Play Alliance is a global coalition of gaming professionals and companies committed to developing quality games. We provide a forum for gaming professionals and companies to work together to develop and share best practices in encouraging healthy communities and awesome player interactions in online gaming.

We envision a world where games are free of harassment, discrimination, and abuse, and where players can express themselves through play.

Where to Learn More

Please visit our resource hub for more resources:

fairplayalliance.org/resources

For developers, by developers. The FPA is an industry-lead alliance here to help. Visit www.fairplayalliance.org if you would like to access any of our resources, or reach out to info@ fairplayalliance.org for support from any of our resident experts in player dynamics or to learn more about how you can help.

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Games and platforms need community guidelines to outline intent and the expected code of conduct. They lay down the foundation to build the social systems and player dynamics of your product. They inform reporting categories, community management and player support practices.

Strong community guidelines are an important step towards setting your community's tone by influencing healthy behavior norms. What are good community guidelines?

Use the language of the game. It is helpful to create the sense, when possible, that your community guidelines live in the world of the game/platform. There are exceptions for extremely harmful conduct (like doxing and child grooming), and it is best to solicit the help of your legal team for addressing those scenarios.

> **Example:** Sea of Thieves' Pirate Code. Community members contributed to the code via their official forums as they were shaping it.

Keep it brief, clear and illustrative. League of Legends' The Summoner's Code is an example of all these elements applied. Like Sea of Thieves' Pirate Code, it is displayed in-game as part of the onboarding process and players must read and agree to abide by it.

Provide examples of positive behaviors aligned with community expectations. Find a way to encourage a welcoming attitude and the form it could take from current players, such as the following example:

> *"Help us keep our community positive and fun. If you see a new player, consider saying hello, welcoming them, or offering to answer any questions."*

Invite players to make a commitment to fostering a healthy community, such as the AnyKey GLHF Pledge.

Offer specific examples of behaviors that do not align with the community and share alternatives. Instead of a vague message like "Don't harass others and abide by our Terms of Use," you can articulate the behavior more clearly, leading with a positive angle as Roblox's Community Rules do:

> "**Be careful in the words that you choose.** Be kind to others. Do not insult or put down other participants. Harassment and other exclusionary behavior aren't acceptable."

Tie back to company values and the platform/game's purpose by using the vision and mission as the foundation. As an example, here is one of the core beliefs articulated in Supercell's story:

> "**Games that people will play for years.** Many of us had been big fans of games like World of Warcraft, which most people play for years, not just weeks or months. Our dream was to create game services with longevity like that. And we wanted to create them for the widest group of people possible. They would be games that almost everyone could get into. The two core pillars around which we wanted to build this longevity would be game play and social. We believed in the power of simple, fun game play. Many of us even longed for the golden days of PC gaming when games were all about great game play. And when it comes to social, we just thought games would be more fun when played with friends and other people."

This core belief connects to an excerpt from Supercell's Safe and Fair Play Policy:

> "We're all here to enjoy games together. Sometimes that can mean arguing with friends over lost battles or derbies. That's fine, but being abusive towards others drains the fun from the game."

Spell out consequences for not following guidelines. Here is an excerpt from Xbox's Community Standards, found under the section entitled "Consequences":

> *"Our priority is the safety and enjoyment of everyone on Xbox Live. Content and behavior that puts players at risk or makes them feel unwelcome has no place in the Xbox online community. So, sometimes we need to step in. We're not out to punish, but rather to protect everyone's experience.*
>
> *Every suspension or other corrective action aims only to show what was wrong and what can be learned from a situation. When suspensions end, we welcome players back so they can contribute to Xbox Live in positive ways. We know people make mistakes, and we believe lapses in judgment can be significant opportunities for growth."*

Fundamental Practices

Consider the following when creating and maintaining your community guidelines:

Understand and establish your company values. Before starting (or revisiting) your code of conduct, take time to understand what values you want to see in your game/platform and what is important to your organization and players. Going through this activity can help ensure that the systems you build to support these values are in lockstep and create a mechanism through which you can build alignment and accountability. Refer back to the outcome of this exercise as you craft your community guidelines and update them.

Note: If you do not have an existing process, consider the values exercise from the Assessing the Behavior Landscape resource.

Note: For more information on enforcement and penalties, consider our resource on Planning a Penalty and Reporting System.

Having a code of conduct or community guidelines is only the starting point. It is important to represent and reinforce your code of conduct across your game/platform. This consistency is key and part of a larger community strategy. Furthermore, consistently enforcing your guidelines builds player/member trust.

Balance the need to be specific while ensuring players read your code of conduct. Finding alternative ways to relay information to players can help. For example, adding the code of conduct or key aspects as part of the game/platform onboarding, inserting bite-sized reminders throughout the user experience, or creating specific in-product events related to the guidelines and community values.

Some factors that can influence how you find that balance:

- The type of community you have and your touchpoints. Who is your audience? Do you have a game or a streaming platform?
- The type of user-generated content on your service/platform.
- How you enforce violations of that conflict.

While the goal is to achieve clarity, some platforms contain many sub-communities in their fold. Each desires specificity, detail, and above all, transparency on the standards to judge content. Here is an example of how FPA member Twitch updated its Community Guidelines and Policies to deliver a high level of detail and transparency: https://blog.twitch.tv/en/2020/04/07/update-to-our-nudity-and-attire-policy/

Also, consider how you can help communities have greater agency in setting their own rules. This can help take into account the different expectations or needs that can exist within a platform among various communities and influencers. FPA member Facebook Gaming partnered directly with the FPA in the creation and initial launch of the rules that creators and moderators can use to customize their guidelines and help avoid disruptive or harmful comments: https://venturebeat.com/2020/01/30/facebook-gaming-launches-tools-for-streamers-to-deal-with-trolls/

More framing around the positive. Whenever possible, lead with the values you want to see, such as "Playing together, caring and respecting each other is what this community is about." Doing so will help reinforce the goal to players and empower them with specific examples that encourage community members to embody that spirit.

Consider new ways to incentivize and reward community members who walk the walk—for example, weekly or monthly player shout-outs. The goal is to help build healthy habits and an overall community tone in line with your goals.

Frequently revisit and update policies and guidelines. Determine a cadence and make that revision a part of your team's process. In particular:

* It is critical to act fast to amend or add policy when an emerging risk arises, or regional conditions change, such as the outbreak of civic unrest. Be prepared for things to change quickly!

* Furthermore, getting your policy in front of staff and the community as soon as possible allows you to have timely input and verify it is practical, applicable, and resonant.

Define what the community is or who you are targeting. Does the community comprise players/ members within the game or platform? Is it within the broader ecosystem of company-monitored forums? Perhaps both, and it might even extend to third-party platforms.

You may need to find a balance between a recommendation or request and an enforceable guideline. It is powerful to have values you wish to see in all spaces relating to the game/platform expressed succinctly and effectively. But if you are generating a code of conduct, there is work to understand what is enforceable and what that means across your community's whole ecosystem.

Collaborate with your community. If you already have an audience but no existing code of conduct or your code needs to be updated, you should consider working with the community. Be mindful of underrepresented voices as you will need to seek them out and take care not to draw imbalanced conclusions. It is vital to ensure that the final standards meet your company's values, and the community voice is represented but not the deciding factor, especially if some of its feedback goes against what you stand for.

> We recommend pursuing user feedback to determine what would work best for your community. If you have access to user-experience teams, the ability to consult with external experts, or experience conducting user surveys, even better. You can apply user-centered methods to understand what aspects of your community guidelines work or do not work for your users. For example, qualitative methods allow you to understand your player's perception of the code of conduct and refine your guidelines.
>
> Across methods, consider getting feedback from a diverse perspective, so you are not over-indexing your community guidelines on one sample of your game or platform's population. Seize this as an opportunity to work with your DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) staff. Also, consider outreach to civil society organizations representing vulnerable and marginalized communities to bring their perspectives into your product development process.
>
> Note: If you do not have an existing process, consider the values exercise from the Assessing the Behavior Landscape resource.

Ensure your team knows their conduct expectations. At a minimum, team conduct should not violate your community guidelines. If a violation occurs, will there be consequences? If it was a public display, how will you answer community questions about such behavior? Think in terms of what it will mean for players/members' trust and your ability to reliably and effectively hold players accountable in the face of inconsistency. Having that established early on can be important, regardless of company size.

Add guidance regarding pop culture, internet lingo, memes and emojis. Be clear about where you draw the line. As those meanings adapt so quickly, this might be an area of your community guidelines/ code of conduct that will need regular revision. Ensure that you have a means to detect these shifts as early as possible and a process to determine how (if at all) you will react both internally and externally to players.

Additional Company Examples

Electronic Arts Positive Play Charter:
https://www.ea.com/commitments/positive-play/charter

Roblox Community Rules:
https://en.help.roblox.com/hc/en-us/articles/203313410-Roblox-Community-Rules

Twitch Community Guidelines:
https://www.twitch.tv/p/legal/community-guidelines

Xbox Community Standards:
https://www.xbox.com/en-US/legal/community-standards

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