

ICEERS SUPPORT CRITERIA

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Preface

Throughout history and around the world, humans have sought to expand their minds, heal themselves and deepen the connection their ancestors, nature and the cosmos through the use of plants with special psychoactive properties. In recent years, cultural globalization and transnational movements have paved the path for traditional practices to expand beyond customary local contexts, evolving into diverse cultural expressions with new cosmologies. Unfortunately, practices involving the use of these ethnobotanical medicines and sacraments have increasingly been subject to legal persecution in countries where the misguided “war on (some) drugs” jeopardizes human rights and cognitive liberties.

The Ayahuasca Defense Fund (ADF) aims to provide key information to help increase legal protections for these traditional and non-traditional practices and to ensure the best possible legal support for those in need. Past experiences in legal cases have demonstrated the importance of ethical and responsible behavior on behalf of ceremonial practitioners and facilitators in order to achieve positive outcomes. While in many countries the legal situation around the use of these plants is unclear, it is clear that these plants are very powerful tools that could present risk to the well-being of participants if used without human care, respect, safety and responsibility.

As guidance for groups or individuals involved in such activities, the ADF has drafted 18 criteria for ethical and responsible practice that we consider important for practitioners to follow so that legal certainty and defensibility are maximized. Since we want to deploy the financial resources obtained from the international community for legal supports in the most effective and efficient way, and thereby to achieve positive legal precedents that return the benefit to the whole community, these criteria will be used in assessing cases where legal assistance is sought to decide on the strategy and level of support.

CRITERIA

Practitioner's striving to do no harm

The practitioner's striving to do no harm, neither willfully nor otherwise through indifference, neglect, or irresponsibility. Acknowledging the always possible accident or error intrinsic to the complex human condition, avoiding physical, spiritual and psychological harm to participants. Genuinely respecting and caring for the people, plants and animals with whom you work.

Commitment to the welfare of participants

The overarching, supreme commitment to the welfare and optimal well-being of participants. Working with participants honorably and always providing the highest level of service the practitioner is capable of, while never neglecting safety and security. Supporting participants in maximizing the benefits of their experiences through proper preparation, supervision, follow-up integration and aftercare.

Remain within the boundaries of training and experience

Not practicing outside the boundaries of the practitioners training, experience and competence. Ensuring knowledge of the risks and responsibilities of whatever process undertaken and service offered. Seeking the necessary support in any process the practitioner brings forth in service to others. Continuing building personal and professional capacity and level of knowledge is an important part of the work with teacher plants. This includes maintaining an ongoing relationship with an established tradition where these plants originate, for continuing education and instruction. Honesty and transparency in response to questions regarding training and experience, and, when asked, the provision of accurate information about the methodology, effectiveness and limitations of the practice.

Interaction and screening

Communication and connection with participants prior to providing services. acknowledging that the services provided may impact in mental, emotional, behavioral, spiritual, psychological and physical ways. Expending the energy and commitment required to have genuine, empathic interpersonal contact with participants. At a minimum, screening participants for medications, and physical and mental health conditions that may not be compatible with the services offered.

Integrity of practices utilizing ayahuasca

Defending the honor and integrity of practices utilizing ayahuasca or other teacher plants, and doing what is possible to minimize harm to any participant that may occur due to the exceptional complexity and scope of the human-plant interaction. If the practitioner is aware of impending danger or maltreatment of anyone, taking whatever appropriate action possible to prevent or minimize the harm that foreseeably might occur.

Information and consent

Assuming and accepting responsibility to inform participants truthfully and fully concerning the nature, benefit, risks and limitations of services. Encouraging participants to be discerning and to ask questions. Sharing, when beneficially appropriate to a participant, alternative or competitive options to teacher plant encounters. Verifying that the risks and limitations of services are plainly understood by the participant, and that the participant has given his/her voluntary consent to the services. In the case of minors participating in ceremonies, always require a written consent of both parents. Even though in different cultures the participation of minors is legitimate, in other contexts this can be very controversial and have legal implications.

Honest and reasonable fees

Being honest and frank about any fees for the services. Any fees should be fair and reasonable for the services provided. Being trustworthy with the financial agreements and contracts made with the participants. In no case asking for money to which the practitioner is not entitled, and never to ask for money or other form of compensation during a session or immediately after when the participant is in a vulnerable or open state of consciousness.

Quality of services

Providing the services promised to participants. Being attentive to all essential details of organization, including preparing participants for the process in which they will participate. Providing trained support and relief staff at a level fully adequate for the planned services and number of participants scheduled. Adequately arranging the physical space, and provide all food, drink and lodging promised. Ensuring quality, comfort and safety sufficient to meet the needs of the participants and the process. Communicating clearly about what will and will not be provided, and about what participants need to bring for a high-quality and maximally beneficial experience.

Knowledge of plant preparation components

Knowing the source, the content and to the degree possible the composition of any plant preparation provided. Doing everything reasonably possible to assure the preparation's quality, consistency and relative safety. Always be transparent with participants about the components, ingredients and/or composition of what the practitioner is serving them. Serving amounts that are reasonable and respective of a participant's particular circumstances.

Safety and emergency protocols

Pledging to protect the safety of participants and seek outside help when necessary. Being prepared for possible medical emergencies, including awareness of transportation and routes to help. When necessary, seeking medical help even at the risk of one's own exposure. Pledging awareness about, readiness for, and sensitivity to the possible need to consult or refer participants to professionals in other disciplines when it is in their best interest. In the case of serious adverse events or death, do what is necessary to fully inform family and cooperate with authorities.

Respecting confidentiality

Respecting confidentiality. Not divulging the identity of participants when discussing cases with others. Protecting privacy, except for constructive and confidential conversations aimed at advancing disciplinary knowledge, improving treatment of or care for a participant, or arranging for a referral. Confidentiality may be breached when necessary to prevent serious crimes or calamities, or when involuntarily or legally coerced to testify in accordance with the law.

Respecting integrity

Never sexually, spiritually, psychologically or physically harass or abuse a participant. Not having sexual relationships, either consensual or coerced, with a current or recent participant, nor with their spouse, partner, offspring, or other close relative, or significant friend. Given the inherent power imbalance between the practitioner and the participant, consent cannot be assumed or assured, even in cases when the participant approaches the practitioner. In the case of love or a consensual sexual relationship, ensuring that the connection is not exploitative by waiting at least six months from the end of the practitioner-participant relationship before beginning a romantic or sexual relationship. It is the practitioner's responsibility to uphold this ethic and to inform participants of this ethical practice.

No financial exploitation

Never financially exploit a participant. Not exploiting a state of heightened suggestibility to seduce participants into any kind of financial relationship, other than those negotiated transparently in advance for participation in ceremonies (if monetary compensation is involved). Ensuring that financial exchanges or relationships are not exploitative, and not profiteering from the work with these plants, which are considered sacred for many people. Not entering into any financial business dealing with a current or recent participant for at least six months from the end of the practitioner-participant relationship.

Avoid messianic approach

Never exploit the good-naturedness or vulnerability natural to altered states of consciousness, healing and growth. Nor exploiting the awe and respect often associated with spiritual awakening, nor the fear, dependency, or loneliness people might feel or reveal. Not endorsing nor encouraging a heroic or messianic narrative about the practitioner, nor presenting oneself as something one is not.

Doing this work for the good of humanity and the planet

Doing this work for the good of humanity and the planet. Respecting our evolution and history that has brought us this far in our existence and will strive to protect the honor of ayahuasca or other teacher plants and practices for future generations. Striving to be sustainable in one's practices, and working with respect for the diversity of life and spirit that constitutes our shared humanity.

Advertisement and proselytism

Practitioners must be committed not to make advertising claims or proselytism for the sessions or the utilization of ayahuasca or other teacher plants in social networks or communication media. The appropriate information must be provided in a sensitive, responsible manner, avoiding to speak on behalf of other organizations or presenting themselves as representatives of indigenous lineages without the relevant accreditation.

Pay your taxes

To the extent financial transactions are involved, depending on the laws of the country where these activities are taking place, certain tax payments to the state may be required. Practitioners need to be aware of these legal obligations and not imagine that they are exempt from paying them because the work they are doing is religious or beneficent. Income from many such works would be considered taxable by the state, and failure to pay taxes on income earned is a common way that the authorities are able to prosecute offenders when a choice is made to do so.

Giving back to the source

We recognize the importance of those who have guarded the knowledge related to the use of these sacred plants, for thousands of years, so that we are able to benefit from the privilege we now have today. In this regard we encourage people in the industrialized areas in the northern hemisphere to contribute meaningfully, financially and collaboratively with respect to the needs of the communities from where the plants, or the tea itself, is being sourced.

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