

PRINCIPLES FOR PARANORMAL INVESTIGATION ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR MEMBERS

Rationale: With the rapid growth in the number of paranormal investigation organizations in recent years, the need has arisen for a commonly-accepted set of principles and standards by which such organizations operate. Such standards (a) assure clients that a particular paranormal investigation and its members subscribe to basic ethical and professional standards, (b) provide members of such organizations with clear guidelines for appropriate conduct, and (c) elevate the image of paranormal investigation organizations in the eyes of the public. The intent of these standards is not to dictate rules but rather to articulate the common principles and standards by which legitimate paranormal investigators generally operate.

The Paranormal Resource Alliance endorses two sets of standards. One set comprises a *Code of Conduct for Paranormal Investigators* that involves general ethical and professional standards that apply to paranormal investigation organizations and their individual members. The second set of standards involves *Investigation Standards for Paranormal Investigation Organizations*—broadly accepted practices for planning, conducting, analyzing, and reporting paranormal investigations.

Every paranormal investigation organization should adopt a code of professional conduct that each member agrees to abide by before taking part in an investigation. The code of conduct should include, but not be limited to, the principles below.

Code of Conduct for Paranormal Investigators

1. Paranormal investigation organizations and their members should only conduct activities for which they have appropriate knowledge and training, specifically investigations of apparitions, hauntings, poltergeists, and other inferred spirit-related phenomena.
2. Spiritual or religious blessings, house cleansings, or exorcisms should be performed only by persons who are trained and certified to conduct these activities. Furthermore, paranormal investigators may not perform activities that, according to state law, would constitute the practice of psychology.
3. A paranormal investigation organization and its members must accurately represent the knowledge, expertise, and experience of the group and its members at all times.
4. Paranormal investigators must not fabricate or falsify evidence. Furthermore, investigators are obligated to report when they realize that a piece of evidence that others believe is paranormal is, in fact, of mundane origin.
5. Paranormal investigation organizations and their members must obey all federal, state, and municipal laws and regulations.

6. The paranormal investigation organization and its members should place the well-being of the client and his or her family above all other priorities.
7. The paranormal investigation organization and its members should assure that an investigation does not in any way harm any property of the client, other people who are not involved with the investigation, or any private or public business, organization, or concern.
8. The paranormal investigation organization and its members should assure that an investigation does not violate the rights, privacy, or well-being of people who are not involved in the investigation (such as neighbors, bystanders, and other people in proximity to an investigation).
9. Investigators must treat one another and their clients with respect at all times.
10. To protect the confidentiality of its client(s), a paranormal investigation organization and its members should not publish or release data from an investigation without signed consent by the client. Release of data collected in investigations of public venues generally does not need consent.
11. A paranormal investigation organization and its members should maintain professional composure during an investigation by avoiding expressions of strong emotions (such as showing fear, running away, or overreacting to paranormal activity).
12. Fees may not be charged for conducting paranormal investigations. Donations to help defray the costs of investigations or research may be accepted provided they are offered voluntarily by a client or other person and not solicited by the paranormal investigation organization.
13. A paranormal investigation organization and its members should not sponsor “ghost hunting” excursions or “haunted houses” for the public that play upon sensationalism or fear. “Ghost hunting” excursions for the public that focus upon history, local stories, and the acquisition of knowledge about the paranormal are acceptable.
14. Paranormal investigation organizations may not actively recruit a member in good standing who belongs to another paranormal investigation organization or subsidiary group of a paranormal investigation organization. This does not preclude inviting members of other paranormal investigation organizations on an investigation as a guest.
15. Paranormal investigation organizations or individual members of a paranormal investigation organization must not slander or misrepresent the character or skills of another paranormal investigation organization or any member of another paranormal investigation organization.

Investigation Standards for Paranormal Investigation Organizations

A. Pre-Investigation Standards: Preparing for the Investigation

1. Ideally, a face-to-face or telephone interview should be conducted with the client(s) prior to beginning a field investigation to collect factual and anecdotal information necessary to establish the validity and severity of the case and to develop plans for an optimal investigation if one is undertaken.

2. The lead investigator should describe in advance to the client or contact person the duration and nature of the investigation, the number and training of investigators who will be present, the nature of data to be collected, and all other considerations that might reasonably be expected to influence the client's decision to proceed with the investigation.

3. For investigations of private residences and other private property, it is strongly recommended that explicit, written agreements involving (a) access to the property and (b) hold harmless/liability provisions be executed between the paranormal investigation organization and the property owner prior to the investigation.

B. Investigation Standards: Conducting the Investigation

1. Each PRA member paranormal investigation organization should adopt basic investigation protocols or guidelines similar to the Paranormal Resource Alliance Suggested Data Collection Guidelines published on the PRA web site.

2. Individuals conducting an investigation should be properly trained in the operation of investigative equipment and instructed on investigation protocols by a person experienced in field investigation.

3. During the field investigation, investigators should maintain a professional demeanor. This includes not playing pranks to frighten or startle other investigators, refraining from silliness or horseplay, not expressing fear or other strong emotions, and not making statements that may alarm the client(s).

4. Paranormal investigators should refrain from using provocation to elicit paranormal activity except in extreme and unusual circumstances and with prior consent of the client.

5. Procedures and methodologies employed for the collection and analysis of paranormal data should generally be based on standard methods published by the Paranormal Resource Alliance (PRA), the American Society of Psychical Research (ASPR), the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), the Parapsychological Association (PA), the Rhine Research Center (RRC), The University of Edinburgh – Koestler Parapsychology Unit, the Parapsychology Foundation, or other organizations with expertise in the development of standardized methods. Modifications of standard methods may be used provided that the modifications are documented and reported.

6. The use of experimental procedures and methods are encouraged provided that the following safeguards are documented and reported:

a. Any possible problems or risks associated with using novel or experimental procedures or methods should be discussed with the client and paranormal investigation organization members before use.

b. All quality control and quality assurance procedures followed during any collection and analysis of data should be described, along with any major problems encountered.

c. The date, location, and time of collection, and the name of the individual who collected the data should be entered into the permanent record for the investigation.

d. Conclusions should not be based on a new or experimental method until it is determined precisely what information provided by the method actually reveals.

e. Investigatory methods that involve the potential emission or discharge of hazardous substances, such as ionization or chemicals, should be conducted in a manner that provides for the protection of human health and the environment.

f. Any novel procedure or method must be discontinued if it is determined during the course of the experiment that further use might jeopardize the health and safety of the clients(s) or investigators.

C. Post-Investigation Standards: Analysis and Reporting

1. The paranormal investigation organization and its members should not discuss preliminary interpretations or conclusions with a client during an investigation. All data should be analyzed before any conclusions are shared.

2. The lead investigator should allow data collection and analyses to be performed only by persons who are qualified by appropriate education, training, and experience. Trainees may collect and analyze data only under the direct supervision of a qualified investigator.

3. Upon completion of an investigation, analysis of data should be concluded as soon as practical, but in no case more than two weeks from the date of the investigation.

4. Data analysis and the interpretation of results should include all instrument measurements, videography and photography, audio recordings, and personal observations, as well as background information collected prior to the investigation.

5. The paranormal investigation organization and its members should report all relevant data (EVP, EMF, photographic evidence, thermal imaging, personal experiences, etc.) to the client through a face-to-face meeting and/or a written report.

6. The paranormal investigation organization and its members should refrain from sharing personal impressions with the client regarding the identity, nature, motivations, and potential danger of detected activity or entities unless there is a strong evidential basis for such conclusions. In all instances, objective data must be clearly distinguished from personal interpretations of those data.

7. Conclusions should be based on the probability of confirming or disconfirming the hypothesis of whether a location is paranormally active. In the case in which no evidence of paranormal activity is found, the paranormal investigation organization should offer potential explanations of the causes of the anomalous activity to the client(s).

8. The outcome of the investigation should be presented to the client as soon as practical but in no case more than one month from the date of the investigation.

9. Results of the investigation and conclusions should be reviewed by multiple members of the paranormal investigation organization prior to release to the client. Peer review by members of other paranormal investigation organizations, under an agreement to maintain confidentiality, is encouraged.

10. The lead investigator should ensure that reports and other documents comply with the client's agreement with the organization and associated protocols. All documents that contain the results of data collection and analyses should include the information listed in the Paranormal Resource Alliance Guidelines for Report Writing published on the PRA web site.

11. All investigation reports require certification by the paranormal investigation organization. An investigator's certification should include the following statement, signed and dated by the lead investigator:

"I certify that I am personally familiar with the information contained in this report, including any and all supporting documents accompanying this certification, and that the material and information contained herein is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, true, accurate, and complete and complies with the Paranormal Resource Alliance Standards for Paranormal Investigation Organizations."

12. In the situation in which the lead investigator is not the founder, president, director, or team leader for the organization who has day-to-day responsibility for the performance of the organization and for whose name is listed on behalf of the organization as the point of contact for PRA membership, the report should also contain the following certification:

"I certify that I have personally examined and am familiar with the information contained in this submittal, including any and all documents accompanying this certification, and that, based on my inquiry of those individuals immediately responsible for obtaining the information, the material and information contained herein is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, true, accurate and complete."

13. After an investigation and presentation of the results and conclusions, the paranormal investigation organization should provide the client(s) with contact information of specialists who may be of assistance should counseling or other forms of help be necessary or desired.

14. If a follow-up investigation is warranted and requested by the client, the investigation should be scheduled as soon as is practical.

15. The paranormal investigation organization and its members are encouraged to share evidence with other PRA member paranormal investigators for purposes of re-analysis. Such evidence must be de-identified with respect to the identity of the client and location of the activity unless the client agrees in advance to being identified. Investigators who obtain data for secondary analysis must not share it with others in any form without the written consent of the client and the primary investigator.