

ORBIT NAVIGATORS

ORBIT Navigator Guidelines & Code of Ethics

Public-facing standards for ethical, professional, privacy-conscious peer application support.

Scope note. These are ORBIT organizational standards. They do not replace applicable university policies, institutional review requirements, sponsor rules, professional standards, or law. When another authority imposes a stricter requirement, that requirement controls.

Purpose of these standards

ORBIT Navigators provide peer-based application support to students pursuing research programs, internships, fellowships, scholarships, grants, and other academic opportunities.

The purpose of an ORBIT Navigator is to help students understand and navigate the application process while ensuring that every application remains an authentic representation of the student.

ORBIT Navigator Guidelines

1. Student Privacy and Confidentiality

- Treat student information, application materials, and conversations as private.
- Use student information only for the purpose of providing Navigator support.
- Do not share identifiable student information, application materials, screenshots, essays, resumes, or communications with friends, classmates, other applicants, or unrelated ORBIT members.
- Discuss a student case with another ORBIT leader or Navigator only when additional support is legitimately needed and only to the extent necessary.
- Keep student documents in secure, approved locations and avoid unnecessary copying, downloading, or long-term retention.
- Do not post student materials or communications on social media, public channels, or public AI tools.
- Respect a student's decision not to disclose information that is unnecessary to the application process.
- If unsure whether information may be shared, default to not sharing it until appropriate ORBIT guidance is obtained.

2. Ethical Application Support

- Help students understand instructions, eligibility requirements, deadlines, application components, and next steps.
- Help students compare programs, create application timelines and checklists, brainstorm, outline, revise, and improve their materials.
- Provide meaningful feedback on personal statements, research statements, resumes, CVs, recommendation strategies, interviews, and final application review.
- Teach, guide, question, review, and collaborate. Do not take ownership of a student's application in a way that misrepresents who created the work.
- Ensure that the final application accurately reflects the student's own experiences, qualifications, goals, ideas, and voice.

3. Accurate Representation of Student Experiences

- Never encourage or assist a student in fabricating, exaggerating, or misrepresenting research experience, employment, volunteer activities, leadership positions, awards, publications, presentations, academic accomplishments, skills, certifications, coursework, GPA, dates, responsibilities, hours, titles, memberships, or personal experiences.
- Help students describe real experiences more clearly and effectively without changing the underlying facts.
- When an experience is unclear, ask: “What did you personally do?” The student's factual answer should determine how the experience is represented.

4. Personal Statements and Application Essays

- Navigators may help students understand prompts, brainstorm experiences, identify themes, organize ideas, outline, review drafts, suggest revisions, strengthen structure, improve clarity, and tailor materials to an opportunity.
- Navigators may provide substantial writing support, but should avoid replacing a student's entire statement with writing that no longer reflects the student's own voice or experiences.
- Explain why major revisions improve the application so that the student learns from the process.
- The goal is: “I will help you communicate your story effectively,” not “I will create a story for you.”

5. Eligibility and Program Requirements

- Prioritize the most current official program website, application portal, or official program materials.
- Never invent eligibility information or assume a student is eligible or ineligible based on incomplete information.
- When a requirement is unclear, explain what is known, identify what remains uncertain, and encourage verification with the official program when appropriate.
- Report potentially inaccurate ORBIT Access information so it can be reviewed.
- Use careful language. “Based on the current published requirements, you appear to meet the listed criteria” is appropriate; “You definitely qualify” is not when uncertainty remains.

6. No Guarantee of Admission

- Never guarantee acceptance, interviews, scholarships, funding, recommendations, or selection.
- Navigators may help students prepare stronger and more complete applications, but final decisions belong to the external institution or organization.
- Use language such as “This can strengthen your application,” not “This will get you accepted.”

7. Recommendation Letters

- Help students identify appropriate potential recommenders and plan how and when to approach them.
- Help students prepare a professional request, organize deadlines, and determine what materials to provide a recommender.
- Never write a recommendation letter and misrepresent it as someone else's work, pressure a recommender, misstate the student-recommender relationship, or list someone without permission.

8. Professionalism

- Communicate respectfully, respond professionally, prepare for meetings, arrive on time, and follow through on commitments.
- Give realistic expectations and avoid judgmental or dismissive language.
- Treat students equitably regardless of prior experience, home institution, or familiarity with research.
- Explain unfamiliar terminology and be patient with first-time applicants.
- Keep communication focused on the student's goals and use appropriate ORBIT-approved communication channels.

9. Know the Limits of Your Knowledge

- Navigators are not expected to know everything.
- It is appropriate to say, “I don’t know, but let's find the official information.”
- When unsure, check the official source, seek appropriate ORBIT guidance, or encourage the student to contact the program directly.
- Accuracy is more important than appearing certain.

10. Respect Student Autonomy

- Provide options, reasoning, and guidance, then allow the student to make the final decision.
- Do not pressure students to apply to a particular program, choose a particular career, disclose private experiences, or accept a suggested revision.
- Do not make a student feel obligated to share personal information simply because it might make an essay more compelling.

11. Appropriate Use of AI and Other Tools

- AI tools must never be used to fabricate experiences, achievements, research, qualifications, personal stories, or recommendations.

- Review AI-generated suggestions for accuracy and ensure that final materials reflect the student's authentic experiences and voice.
- Follow the AI-use rules of the opportunity or institution to which the student is applying.
- Do not upload confidential student materials to tools that are not approved for handling that information.

12. Conflicts of Interest

- Disclose situations that could interfere with neutral support, including direct competition for the same highly limited opportunity, personal conflicts, or access to confidential selection information.
- When appropriate, the request should be reassigned.

13. When to Ask ORBIT Leadership for Help

- Seek guidance when there is uncertainty about privacy, ethics, appropriate boundaries, possible academic dishonesty, harassment, a request to fabricate information, or a situation beyond the Navigator role.
- Navigators are not expected to handle every difficult situation alone.

ORBIT Navigator Code of Ethics

The ORBIT Navigator Code of Ethics expresses the principles that should guide Navigator judgment even when a specific situation is not explicitly covered by a rule.

1. Confidentiality

We protect student information, application materials, and private communications. We share information only when necessary for legitimate ORBIT support and through appropriate channels.

2. Honesty

We do not fabricate, exaggerate, conceal, or knowingly misrepresent student experiences, eligibility, application requirements, or expected outcomes.

3. Authentic Student Voice

We help students strengthen their own applications without replacing their experiences, ideas, or voice with work that falsely appears to be theirs.

4. Accuracy

We verify important program information using current official sources and clearly distinguish verified facts from uncertainty.

5. Respect and Autonomy

We treat students with dignity, patience, and respect. We provide guidance without coercing students into particular programs, career choices, disclosures, or revisions.

6. Professionalism

We communicate responsibly, prepare for meetings, follow through on commitments, maintain appropriate boundaries, and represent ORBIT with care.

7. Fairness and Inclusion

We provide support equitably and do not allow institutional prestige, prior research experience, background, or familiarity with the research process to determine the respect or effort a student receives.

8. Competence and Humility

We work within the limits of our knowledge. When we do not know an answer, we seek reliable information or appropriate guidance rather than guessing.

9. Responsible Use of Technology

We use AI and other tools only in ways that protect student privacy, preserve authenticity, and comply with program rules.

10. No Guarantee of Outcomes

We help students prepare, but we do not promise admission, interviews, awards, funding, or selection.

11. Accountability

We accept responsibility for our guidance, correct errors when discovered, report serious concerns appropriately, and seek help when a situation exceeds our role.

12. Trust

We recognize that students may share vulnerable or high-stakes application concerns with Navigators. We act in ways that protect the trust students place in ORBIT.

When the right action is unclear

- Is the information I am giving the student accurate and based on an official or reliable source?
- Does this protect the student's privacy and dignity?
- Does this preserve the student's authentic experiences, qualifications, ideas, and voice?
- Am I helping the student learn and decide rather than taking over the application?
- Could a conflict of interest or personal bias affect my guidance?

- Am I working within my knowledge and authority, or should I seek help?
- Would I be comfortable explaining this decision to the student, ORBIT leadership, or the program involved?

NAVIGATOR COMMITMENT

ORBIT Navigator Commitment

As an ORBIT Navigator, I agree to protect student privacy, provide ethical and professional application support, accurately represent student experiences, avoid fabrication or misrepresentation, respect student autonomy, and provide guidance within the boundaries of the ORBIT Navigator role. I understand that my responsibility is to help students strengthen and navigate their own applications, not to create false qualifications, guarantee outcomes, or complete applications dishonestly on their behalf. I will seek guidance from ORBIT leadership when I am uncertain about an ethical, privacy, or professional issue.