

Salisbury University's Re-envisioning Ethics Access and Community Humanities (REACH) Initiative: Integrating Community and Curricular Ethics is grant-funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Humanities Connections Program. REACH, led by Co-Directors Michèle Schlehofer and Timothy Stock, focuses on ethics, ethics literacy and ethics agency through new curricular and co-curricular resources, connecting with the community.

## Ethics: Who Are We Accountable To?

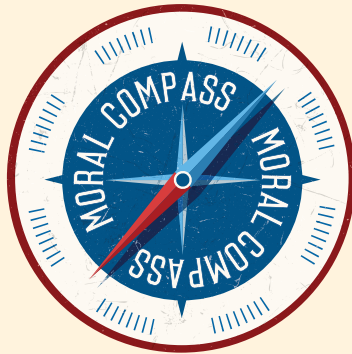
One question that consistently came up is in regard to accountability, or: How are we held to the rules that we set, both within our organizations, and in the larger community?

People tend to answer this question in one of two ways. The first is accountability to **norms**. These are the (often informal) standards or guidelines by which people operate. These include things such as our individual or cultural values, principles, and conduct. Accountability to social norms means "doing the right thing" in accordance with our personal values or organizational or societal culture. These norms are sometimes taken as obvious, but are not always explicitly stated or open to revision.

The second type of accountability is to **community**. This entails how people and organizations are held accountable by the wider public they serve. These include laws, ethics review boards, licensing and accreditation processes, and other formal systems. Organizations articulated very different senses of community, sometimes referring to a narrow group, like members of a profession, and other times referring to the public at large.

Participants in our listening sessions expressed that conflicts can arise between personal and organizational **norms** and **external factors**. Such factors often include legal requirements (waiting periods, documentation, income requirements) or restrictions on funding (unfunded mandates, changing grant or sponsorship conditions). These extrinsic factors can limit the ability to provide services to people who an organization would otherwise serve or otherwise create a climate where organizational norms and mission seem aspirational rather than realistic. These conflicts underscore the disconnect between static ethical guidelines and the fluid nature of organizational practices.

Clearly, accountability is a good thing for increasing ethical agency and an underutilized change agent for organizations. Participants often expressed the desire for greater agency in affecting these external factors and identifying opportunities for revising standards. Coalition-building and partnership with other organizations are means to achieve increased accountability. Organizations should view internal policies and procedures as fluid, living documents, which require continuous updating in response to changes in client or patient needs. Above all, accountability must be created proactively, and peer organizations, clients, managers, leaders and the wider public can all be seen as potential collaborators in achieving increased accountability.



## Update on Our Listening Sessions

The REACH team has wrapped up a successful first year of listening sessions with members in our Community Ethics Network. Over the course of the 2020-2021 academic year, we have conducted a total of seven listening sessions with 28 unique participants, several of whom engaged in multiple sessions. Altogether, these participants represent 17 different community-based organizations, ranging from for-profit enterprises, nonprofit organizations, faith- and religious-based institutions, governmental organizations and departments, and advocacy groups.

During each listening session, participants discussed ethics via a series of guided prompts. Guided prompts differed across listening sessions, and no two conversations were alike. These sessions gave participants an opportunity to discuss how they and their organizations conceptualize ethics, common ethical issues currently faced in our community and how ethical dilemmas are typically solved.

We will be looking at the conversations more closely over the summer as we plan next steps of our project. Ultimately, the conversations will be used to produce resources on ethics for our local community. In this newsletter, we discuss some of the general findings regarding accountability, as well as findings from our survey on community empowerment and agency.

We will be starting up our listening sessions again in the fall, so please be on the lookout for an invitation to participate. We look forward to seeing you!

**7 LISTENING SESSIONS  
CONDUCTED IN 2020-21**

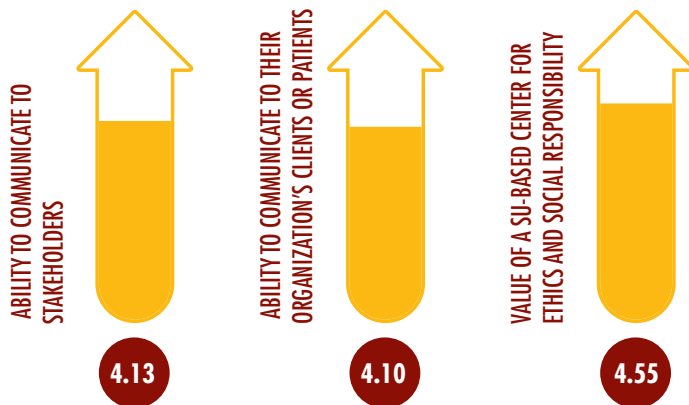




## Snapshot on Community Advocacy and Empowerment

Across 32 responses to our brief survey of Community Ethics Network members:

- When rating on a 5-point scale, participants rated their organization’s ability to communicate a sense of empowerment and agency to stakeholders as 4.13.
- On the same scale, participants rated their organization’s ability to communicate a sense of empowerment and agency to their organization’s clients or patients as 4.10.
- On the same scale, participants rated the value of a Salisbury University-based Center for Ethics and Social Responsibility to facilitate community advocacy and empowerment as 4.55.
- Representatives of 20 organizations felt such a center would “provide strong value” in reaching community advocacy and empowerment goals and providing mechanisms for accountability and collaboration.



## ETHICS PROFILE:

### Sandy Brown

Mid-Shore Pro Bono



#### *Tell us about your organization and what you do?*

Mid-Shore Pro Bono is a non-profit organization located on the Eastern Shore that provides low-income and vulnerable populations access to the civil legal system. We do this by breaking down all the barriers that exist so that people can have the right to counsel in civil matters.

We’ve been doing this work since 2005 here on the Eastern Shore, and it is a challenge because most folks don’t realize that the issues that they’re facing and struggling with on a daily basis have a legal remedy. We work very closely with community partners and potential clients to educate them about their rights because they do not have to navigate the legal system by themselves.

#### *What drew you to be a part of the Community Ethics Network?*

Our existing relationship with Salisbury University was part of the appeal of joining the Community Ethics Network. When I started with Mid-Shore Pro Bono in 2008, we were really narrow in scope and we were still working on becoming more of a community-based-organization. Starting around 2017, we would get an intern from Salisbury University. These were typically students who were interested in law. Through these experiences, we have built a good relationship with the Philosophy Department. Since then, Salisbury University has been such a great partner, as the faculty and students understand our work, see the value in it and support it.

#### *How does ethics improve your work?*

Ethics impacts all areas of our work. It impacts how we treat clients who are coming in the door to give them access to the fair service that they need, and it impacts the work of the attorney. Attorneys are bound by rules of professional conduct and must make sure that they treat our clients respectfully even though they may be disadvantaged. Ethics really governs everything that we do as an organization; we’re really out there trying to do the right thing.