

Our Guiding Principles

(Adapted from SPJ & RTDNA Code of Ethics, WGBH/PBS guidelines and NPR Ethics Handbook)

Our news and public affairs content, whether on the radio, television on the web, or in any other form, must attain the highest quality and strengthen our credibility. Our journalism and public affairs programming is as accurate, fair and complete as possible. Our journalists and producers conduct their work with honesty, courage and respect, and they strive to be both independent and impartial in their efforts. Our methods are transparent and we will be accountable for all we do.

These guidelines represent a distillation of the most important standards and practices. They are not meant to be comprehensive, and so journalists, editors and producers are encouraged to seek the advice or guidance of their management supervisor when in doubt.

Truth and Accuracy Above All

Our purpose is to pursue the truth. Diligent verification is critical. We take great care to ensure that statements of fact in our journalism are both correct and in context. In our reporting, we rigorously challenge both the claims we encounter and the assumptions we bring. We devote our resources and our skills to presenting the fullest version of the truth we can deliver, placing the highest value on information we have gathered and verified ourselves.

Our journalists and producers:

- Take responsibility for the accuracy of their work. Verify information before releasing it. Use original sources whenever possible.
- Remember that neither speed nor format excuses inaccuracy.
- Provide context. Take special care not to misrepresent or oversimplify in promoting, previewing or summarizing a story.
- Seek Unrestricted Access. Do not rehearse or identify questions beforehand, except when the individual is the subject of an investigative interview, in which case they will be informed of the general areas of questioning in advance and, if important for accuracy, will give those individuals an opportunity to check their records.
- Seek Unrestricted Use. Do not offer conditions to be placed upon the uses of an interview. In rare cases when restrictions on use are part of the contract for access, permission should be sought from WJCT Management ahead of time and the conditions should be so stated or explained on the program.
- Gather, update and correct information throughout the life of a news story.

- Identify sources clearly. The public is entitled to as much information as possible to judge the reliability and motivations of sources.
- Identify themselves as journalists/producers when they report.
- Consider sources’ motives before promising anonymity. Reserve anonymity for sources who may face danger, retribution or other harm, and have information that cannot be obtained elsewhere. Explain why anonymity was granted.
- Get consent of all parties before recording any telephone conversation and any in-person conversation that is private.
- Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information unless traditional, open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Electronic eavesdropping and the use of hidden cameras and recording devices should not be undertaken without approval from management.
- Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable. Give voice to the voiceless.
- Support the open and civil exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- Provide access to source material when it is relevant and appropriate.
- Boldly tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience. Seek sources whose voices we seldom hear.
- Label advocacy and commentary.
- Never deliberately distort facts or context, including visual information. Clearly label illustrations and re-enactments.
- Never plagiarize. Always attribute.

Fairness and Respect

Ethical journalism treats sources, subjects, colleagues and members of the public as human beings deserving of respect. We make every effort to gather responses from those who are the subjects of criticism, unfavorable allegations or other negative assertions in our stories. What we broadcast and put online is edited for time and clarity. Whenever we quote, edit or otherwise interpret what people tell us, we aim to be faithful to their meaning, so our stories ring true to those we interview. In all our stories, especially matters of controversy, we strive to consider the strongest arguments we can find on all sides, seeking to deliver both nuance and clarity. Our goal is not to please those whom we report on or to produce stories that create the appearance of balance, but to seek the truth.

Our journalists and producers:

- Approach stories with an open and skeptical mind and a determination through extensive research to become acquainted with a wide range of viewpoints.
- Try to keep personal bias and opinion from unduly influencing the pursuit of a story.
- Diligently seek subjects of news coverage to allow them to respond to criticism or allegations of wrongdoing.
- Avoid stereotyping. Journalists should examine the ways their values and experiences may shape their reporting.
- Do not lobby or endorse candidates, particular political parties or ballot issues.
- Edit to compress and not to distort.
- Do not use music/effects to communicate something that cannot be supported in the script.
- Consult on use of obscene or objectionable materials. Obscenities and materials offensive to general taste or manners (e.g., extreme violence, racial epithets, strong language, and nudity) should be avoided. When it is judged that the exclusion of such material would have the effect of significantly distorting an important reality, the program should carry appropriate warnings.
- Show compassion for those who may be affected by news coverage. Use heightened sensitivity when dealing with juveniles, victims of sex crimes, and sources or subjects who are inexperienced or unable to give consent. Consider cultural differences in approach and treatment.

Act Independently

The highest and primary obligation of ethical journalism is to serve the public. To secure the public's trust, we must make it clear that our primary allegiance is to the public. Any personal or professional interests that conflict with that allegiance, whether in appearance or in reality, risk compromising our credibility. Under no circumstances do we skew our reports for personal gain, to help WJCT's bottom line or to please those who fund us. Decisions about what we cover and how we do our work are made by our journalists, not by those who provide WJCT with financial support.

Our journalists and producers:

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived. Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and avoid political and other outside activities that may compromise integrity or impartiality, or may damage credibility.

- Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; do not pay for access to news. Identify content provided by outside sources, whether paid or not.
- Deny favored treatment to underwriters, donors or any other special interests, and resist internal and external pressure to influence coverage.
- Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two. Prominently label sponsored content.
- Keep a distance from potential funders to the greatest extent possible. The presentation of proposals should be the job of the development office and/or senior management.
- When appropriate, disclose funding relationships in related reports. Avoid rote disclosures as this would clutter programs, rendering appropriate disclosures meaningless. This judgment should be made by editors and producers on a case-by-case basis.

Be Accountable and Transparent

Ethical journalism means taking responsibility for one's work and explaining one's decisions to the public. Just as careful attention to our sources makes a story stronger, careful listening to our public makes our journalism better. So we welcome questions or criticisms from our stakeholders and to the best of our ability, we respond. Mistakes are inevitable. When we make them, we correct them forthrightly, reflect on what happened, and learn from them.

Our journalists and producers:

- Explain ethical choices and processes to audiences. Encourage a civil dialogue with the public about journalistic practices, coverage and news content.
- Respond quickly to questions about accuracy, clarity and fairness.
- Acknowledge mistakes and correct them promptly and prominently. Explain corrections and clarifications carefully and clearly.
- Expose unethical conduct in journalism, including within their organizations.
- Abide by the same high standards they expect of others.