



## Editorial Guidelines and Code of Ethics

According to a 2001 study from PRPD, public radio listeners who get most of their news from an NPR member station see local events as part of an interconnected web of causal relationships. They value in-depth local news programming that presents issues in context, asking and answering such questions as:

- Has this situation happened here before?
- Has it happened elsewhere before?
- Is it part of a pattern?
- What is the cause?
- What is the impact?

These public radio listeners feel events are connected—local to national and international. They value local news that integrates their experience as citizens of their communities AND the world. They want to know about local events in the context of broader national and world events.

WPSU news staff will strive to choose and report stories within this framework.

It is the responsibility of WPSU news staff to be acquainted with and follow this code of ethics:

### 1. FAIR, ACCURATE, AND BALANCED

The fundamental principle of public radio is to address listeners as citizens and individuals, not as consumers. One goal of WPSU news staff is to provide our listeners with a wide range of news and features on a wide range of topics, providing coverage for our 13-county listening area. We will focus on Centre County, where most of our listeners live and where most of the news happens, but we will work proactively to ensure that we regularly include stories about what's happening in all of the regions we reach.

Another goal is to present information that is accurate. We will not distort the facts, lie, slant, or hype. We will check facts; we will never make up quotes. We will separate opinion from fact. If we make errors, we'll correct them promptly, at a time when we are most likely to reach the listeners who heard the original mistake.

A third goal is to present information that is fair and balanced. We will present both sides of each issue; this may be within a single story or in a series of stories. We will assume people are innocent until proven guilty. We will work to present stories from a diversity of viewpoints.

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With regard to balanced reporting, WPSU news staff will aim to eliminate bias when reporting on matters of race, creed, religion, ethnic origin, gender, and sexual preference. We will identify people by race, creed or other group only when it is relevant to the story.

### **2. DEALING FAIRLY WITH SOURCES**

WPSU reporters will use information only from trustworthy sources. We will follow NPR practice and make efforts to name those who provide information to news reports—except in cases where providing names could bring harm to the informant. If we promise confidentiality to a source, we will keep that promise. In all cases, we will respect the dignity and privacy of people we encounter when reporting stories. We will vigorously pursue public right-to-know laws when appropriate or as necessary.

### **3. AVOIDING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The WPSU news team will choose news items and set priorities for broadcast based on accepted best practices in journalism. Staff will be aware of and guard against inappropriate pressure from non-news personnel. Our programming is not required or primarily intended to advance the Penn State University perspective.

WPSU news staff will avoid conflicts of interest. We will not accept gifts or special favors; we will make no promises to provide coverage based on relationships; we will consider personal connections to community organizations when making assignments. We will not accept paid outside work that would conflict with or compromise the reputation of the radio station for fair and balanced journalism. We will avoid political activity that would create a conflict of interest. And we will not use information gained while gathering news for personal gain.

Staff has the responsibility to disclose to the station manager activities that might create a conflict of interest and challenge the public's trust.

Staff will not use station equipment for personal purposes.

### **4. PRODUCTION CONSIDERATIONS**

Sources must always be told that they are being recorded. They must know why they are being recorded—what is the goal of the story.

WPSU does not pay for interviews. In cases where travel presents a hardship, WPSU may offer the interviewee overnight accommodations, reimbursement for actual travel costs, and/or meals.

Significant stories should be based on more than one source.

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In producing reports, WPSU news staff will use sound according to NPR best practices. That is, we will not use sound in a misleading way, by presenting as spontaneous material that is staged or rehearsed, or recorded at a different time or place than it is presented as occurring.

We will make audio editing decisions to keep the story faithful to actual events while advancing understanding of the story. Internal edits or the elimination of pauses are acceptable only if they would NOT alter the listener's perception or understanding of the material.

Commentaries and analysis will be identified as such.

WPSU will use copyrighted material such as music and the material of other broadcasters only with permission or according to the laws of fair use.

We will not broadcast profanity or describe extreme violence or sexual assault unless it is an integral and necessary part of the story. In this case we will first give listeners an advisory as to the story's content.

WPSU does not let sources check a script before broadcast.

### **5. WEB CONSIDERATIONS**

The reputation of WPSU is impacted by the way it is represented via its digital and social media outlets. Thus, it has an obligation to ensure that staff interacts on these platforms professionally and ethically, and that the content on its platforms is appropriate. Thus:

- We need to interact on social media sites with the understanding that all such communications are public. There is no such thing as a separate “professional” and “personal” life for members of the news staff. Members of the news staff are considered reporters 24/7. All behavior online is public. We should conduct ourselves on all digital/social media platforms with the understanding that our conduct reflects on the news organization.
- Journalism should be conducted in the open, regardless of the platform. Journalists using social media to find sources or pursue stories should identify themselves just as they would if they were working offline.
- The use of social media to break news should be done so with the same care as would be taken if a story were broadcast.
- We do not advocate for political or other polarizing issues online. This extends to joining online groups or using social media in any form (including Facebook pages or personal blogs) to express personal views on a political or other controversial issue that could not be written for the air or posted on the station's website.
- Even simple participation in some online groups could be seen to indicate endorsement of their

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views. Reporters should not join a group as a member for newsgathering purposes without exploring alternate possibilities and considering ways to address misconceptions that could occur by observers who notice your membership on the site. If you do join, be clear that you've done so to seek information or story ideas. And if you "friend," "like," join or otherwise take digital steps that might indicate you support a group representing one side of an issue, do so for a group representing the competing viewpoint, when reasonable to do so.

- No comments by visitors to any platform that WPSU controls (such as its website or blog) should be posted without review.
- All links that are published should be reviewed to make sure they are appropriate for WPSU (non-commercial, in good taste, accurate).

### Sources:

PRNDI Code of Ethics

RTNDA Code of Ethics

Jim Lehrer

Wisconsin Public Radio

CPB Ethics Code

Penn State Public Media Editorial Board

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