



CODE OF EDITORIAL INTEGRITY

Ethics, Principles, Editorial Standards and Guidelines

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BACKGROUND

WOSU Public Media is a non-profit, community-based organization licensed by the Federal Communications Commission to operate non-commercial frequencies as a public service of its licensee, The Ohio State University (OSU). WOSU Public Media includes WOSU-FM, WOSA-FM, WOSB-FM, WOSE-FM, WOSP-FM, WOSV-FM, WOSU-TV, WPBO-TV, and broadcast translators in Mansfield for TV and Coshocton for radio. WOSU Public Media also maintains a digital presence online and through social media, and publishes *Airfare* magazine.

WOSU Public Media is managed by a professional staff with advice and counsel of a community advisory board that is a State of Ohio nonprofit corporation called “Friends of WOSU”. Members are recruited with the intention of reflecting the diversity of WOSU’s primary service area. WOSU’s General Manager reports directly to the Vice President of University Communications at Ohio State University. WOSU operates in the public interest by serving the needs of its audiences with editorial independence from University administration, and the OSU Board of Trustees.

The mission of WOSU Public Media is “to enrich lives through content and experiences that engage, inform and inspire,” with a vision to:

- Be the essential source of media that brings distinctive and diverse insights about our world
- Build a better community through involvement and illumination
- Be the preeminent radio news organization in central Ohio
- Be the foremost connection to arts, music, and cultural experiences
- Change the lives of youth through access to and creative use of learning media

WOSU Public Media is funded by a varied group of revenue sources including the University, federal and state governments, agencies, corporations, foundations, grants, and earned revenue with the single largest component coming from individuals who contribute to become members.

INTRODUCTION

WOSU Public Media is committed to providing high quality content and services that are distinctive and responsive to the needs and interests of our communities. In doing so, we are further committed to the ethical and transparent operation of this organization and to the ethical practice of journalism.

The Code of Editorial Integrity provides direction to management and staff, and information to the public, about the operation of WOSU Public Media. We assure the public's continued trust by voluntarily holding ourselves to rigorous standards of integrity — in how we govern our local public media organization, produce our work, raise funds for content and operations, and comport ourselves in the communities served. We affirm our principles and practices through our support of this Code of Editorial Integrity.

The public's trust in our organization is fundamental to achieving our mission and vision. We earn the public's trust through the quality and excellence of our work, the inclusion and reflection of the diversity of our communities, and a commitment to defined professional standards and practices.

We strive to ascertain and understand community needs, issues, and interests; to assure respect and civility in our forums and discussions, and impartiality and objectivity in our coverage of complex and controversial matters; and to be accessible, accountable, and transparent to those who use our services and the community as a whole.

Our principles and standards apply to all the content we produce and present, regardless of subject matter, including news, history, information and cultural arts content. These principles and standards apply across all the channels and platforms at WOSU Public Media and are outlined in the following nine sections:

- I. GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT FOR THE COMMON GOOD**
- II. IDEAS, CULTURE, AND FORUMS WITH RESPECT AND CIVILITY**
- III. JOURNALISM THAT REPORTS EVENTS AND ISSUES WITH ACCURACY AND INTEGRITY**
- IV. INCLUSION AND REFLECTION OF OUR COMMUNITIES' DIVERSITY**
- V. TRANSPARENCY IN PROGRAM SELECTION AND CONTENT CREATION**
- VI. TRANSPARENCY IN FUNDRAISING**
- VII. PREVENTING UNDUE INFLUENCE**
- VIII. CONSISTENT EDITORIAL STANDARDS IN PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS**
- IX. EMPLOYEE ACTIVITIES BEYOND THEIR PUBLIC MEDIA WORK**

I. GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT FOR THE COMMON GOOD

We govern our activities in ways that promote the common good and the public interest, and reflect our commitment to integrity and trustworthiness. These obligations supersede personal and institutional agendas.

WE HAVE A PUBLIC SERVICE MISSION

We provide open meetings for discussion of all aspects of WOSU Public Media through our Friends of WOSU advisory board, which we announce to the public in a timely fashion.

We make key financial statements and an annual local content report available to the public online.

We assess community needs and interests to inform and guide editorial decisions and employ approaches that seek to assure we have been inclusive of the full community and its diversity of voices, experiences, and views.

We require our decision-makers to self-disclose possible conflicts of interests to their colleagues, and to remove themselves from decisions where such conflicts exist.

Senior members of our professional staff are easily accessible to the public.

We regularly discuss and debate elements of this Code and other editorial and fundraising guidelines, review the success of their application in our work, and affirm and update the Code as appropriate.

In fulfilling these commitments to accountability, we are guided by and adhere to multiple legal and regulatory frameworks within which we work. Principal among these are laws, rules, and regulations of the Federal Communications Commission that govern the licensees of noncommercial, educational broadcast stations and requirements applied by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to organizations that benefit from the federal investment in public media.

I. Governance and Management for the Common Good

II. IDEAS, CULTURE, AND FORUMS WITH RESPECT AND CIVILITY

We contribute to the civic, educational, and cultural life of our communities by presenting a range of ideas and cultures and offering a robust forum for discussion and debate.

In doing this work we provide public access to information and resources, and opportunities for lifelong education, cultural offerings of the arts, humanities and sciences, and forums and media to experience diverse voices and views.

We also provide citizens the means to express concerns, ask questions, provide answers and share viewpoints and ideas in ways that are heard and respectfully considered.

We encourage civil discourse and interaction among people with varying interests and perspectives, leading to greater shared knowledge and understanding of differences, constructive problem-solving and sustained community building.

Portions of these activities are accomplished through forums for perspectives and opinions on matters that are important to our communities, including interview programs, panel discussions, talk shows, debates and on-line discussions, and similar opportunities for officials, experts, advocates, and citizens to express their views and hear the views of others.

In all these settings we strive to support a vigorous marketplace of ideas without advocating, endorsing or certifying a particular point of view.

Responsible treatment of important issues may sometimes require the inclusion of controversial or sensitive material. However, morbid or sensational details or material that is gratuitously offensive to general taste or manners (e.g., extreme violence, racial epithets, strong language, nudity, and sexism) should not be included unless it's necessary to an understanding of the matter at hand.

Questions of taste cannot be answered in the abstract, but when specific problems arise, they must be resolved in light of contemporary standards of taste, the state of the law, and the newsworthiness and overall value of the material.

II. Ideas, Culture, and Forums with Respect and Civility

If WOSU Public Media concludes that the exclusion of such material would distort an important reality or impair the content’s artistic quality, WOSU may accept the content provided it carries appropriate notice to the viewer. Conversely, WOSU may reject content that, in its judgment, needlessly contains objectionable material that compromises the content’s quality or integrity. It may also choose to seek community input from the Friends of WOSU Advisory Board.

II. Ideas, Culture, and Forums with Respect and Civility

III. JOURNALISM THAT REPORTS EVENTS AND ISSUES WITH ACCURACY AND INTEGRITY

We pursue facts about events and issues in our communities and other important matters that affect people’s lives with accuracy and integrity.

We aim to foster an informed and engaged public that, in turn, enables a strong and effective democracy, and to support individuals in making good decisions for themselves and their families in their pursuit of a high quality of life.

We take responsibility for the validity of the content we present. We operate within a system of defined professional principles, ethics and practices in gathering data and perspectives. WOSU has developed staff guidelines specifically for the News & Public Affairs division that are regularly reviewed and considered.

IV. INCLUSION AND REFLECTION OF OUR COMMUNITIES' DIVERSITY

The integrity of our work is strengthened by incorporating the diversity of demography, culture, and beliefs in our communities, and the nation, into that work and the content we develop.

We look to the full diversity of our community as we ascertain needs and interests to which we might respond.

We seek to assure that people with different backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences are heard and seen as both sources and subjects of our programming and are invited to participate in our activities.

We seek to create content and activities that reach and serve a diversity of people, recognizing that different programming attracts people with different values, beliefs, lifestyles and ethnicities.

We treat the subjects of our programming with respect. We include points of view that may not be widely shared and individuals and groups that are infrequently heard or seen outside their own communities.

WOSU Public Media has a Diversity Policy and Diversity Annual Report including diversity goals that is reviewed and updated regularly and posted on our website.

V. TRANSPARENCY IN PROGRAM SELECTION AND CONTENT CREATION

We share with our audiences and the public the mission-based and practical reasons for our program choices. We seek to be transparent in how we gather and report news and create other content.

Professional staff members collaborate to decide topics for broadcast and online delivery. Our content decisions are also shaped by practical considerations, such as the need for an overall coherence to our service, interests of audiences, availability of material through other media, costs of different programming we create, costs of programs we acquire, and our overall resources. We aim for public understanding of these services and the practical reasons for our decisions.

Topics we cover for broadcast and online delivery are selected at regular editorial meetings of our professional staff. We welcome suggestions about what to cover and encourage comments, criticisms, and corrections of our work. We work to verify and authenticate the information we present in ways that are visible and understandable to the public: we use and cite public records, publications, and databases whenever possible; we strive to offer opportunities for audiences to learn more about the matters we cover by providing sources of additional information and views.

VI. TRANSPARENCY IN FUNDRAISING

We aim for respectful relationships with our donors and a clear understanding among donors and others about our fundraising operations. We acknowledge the sponsors of our programming and disclose the terms on which we obtain such support.

Our public service depends on donations of all sizes from many different sources. We maintain the trust and confidence of these donors and our communities by making clear the purposes and uses for which we seek their support, making every effort to understand a donor's intent and, after accepting a gift, working to carry out the donor's wishes. We inform donors about how donor records will be used. We protect personal and confidential information that we obtain during fundraising activities or through our ongoing relationships with these donors.

We do not exchange, rent, or sell donor names to commercial concerns, political candidates, political parties or political action committees. We keep donors informed about operations, welcome their suggestions and value their role as advocates in the community.

We always disclose, on air and/or online as appropriate, the funders of specific programs, areas of coverage, or other activities. We acknowledge any person or organization that gives us money or other valuable consideration to broadcast specific content as follows: we acknowledge donors that sponsor the broadcast of a program with broadcast announcements associated with the program; we also acknowledge with broadcast announcements (providing permission is given) donors that have provided substantial general support.

We do not accept anonymous gifts for the production of specific programs.

With permission, we publish a list of donors that have contributed substantial funds for our general support in our annual community report. We also report the overall costs of fundraising, including personnel, consultants, special events, and related support costs. This reporting is part of our overall disclosure of revenue and expenses in our public file as part of our Annual Financial Report to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and provided within financial statements posted on the WOSU Public Media website.

VII. PREVENTING UNDUE INFLUENCE

We strive to assure that our editorial process is free from undue influence. We take care in deciding from whom we seek and accept funds and in setting boundaries with respect to those who contribute.

Public broadcasting is guided by the constitutional guarantees of a free press and by the regulatory framework established by Congress. The Radio Act of 1927 established the requirement that broadcasters operate in the “public interest, convenience, and necessity.”

Our independence is deeply rooted in American values of freedom of speech and of the press, both protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution. The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 reinforces that independence, directing the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to protect public broadcasting entities “from interference with, or control of, program content or other activities.” That being so, licensees hold their federal licenses in trust for the American people and are required to operate in the public’s interest rather than in the licensee’s interest.

The Ohio State University affirms its responsibility to operate WOSU Public Media in the public interest as a public trustee of an asset belonging to the American people. As a trustee, it must enable professional management to operate in a way that will give the public full confidence in the editorial integrity of our programming, meaning the responsible application by professional practitioners of a free and independent decision-making process which is ultimately accountable to the public. We believe that WOSU’s broadcasting activities best benefit The Ohio State University when they are perceived to be independent, honest, and of the highest quality.

We give careful attention to contributions and grants that support specific programs, projects, and activities and seek to avoid both the reality and the appearance of inappropriate influence. We reserve the right to refuse any donation for any reason, including, but not limited to, perceived conflicts of interest, potential audience misconception regarding a funder’s role or influence, and perceived impact on our reputation, integrity, or fundraising ability. We review the propriety of prospective funders on a case-by-case basis, using the framework outlined below.

VII. Preventing Undue Influence

Ongoing News and Information Programming

We exercise close scrutiny when deciding who can fund, sponsor, or otherwise underwrite ongoing news/information programming. We are cautious with respect to potential funders whose principal purpose or agenda is to bring about a specific political outcome or to influence public policy on controversial matters that are subjects of our ongoing coverage. We do not accept funding from political parties or from campaigns for public office.

News Specials, Documentaries and Other Programs

Even with effective safeguards that separate funders from editorial decisions, we have an obligation not to undermine our credibility by accepting support for specific programs from organizations whose participation would raise serious concern about our editorial independence. This includes for-profit businesses, non-profit organizations, and governmental institutions.

We therefore weigh the potential for appearance of conflict, while carefully avoiding any actual conflict. In making these assessments, we occasionally consider whether support from multiple organizations, with multiple perspectives and interests, is appropriate when funding from any one such organization, alone, would not be. We don't accept funding that would obligate us to provide coverage of a topic that we would not have covered with general funds or that requires more extensive coverage than the topic's value or importance warrants.

VII. Preventing Undue Influence

Funding and Underwriting for Music, Arts, and Cultural Programs

We will not accept funds for arts and cultural programs that focus on reviews and recommendations from organizations with a direct interest in the works or performances. We occasionally consider funding from a music or cultural performing group or venue to support the presentation of performances by such groups or at such venues, depending on the answers to such questions as: Is the performance likely to meet our standards of quality for such material? Is there an appropriate reason to accept production funding from one community arts organization while declining such funding from another?

Funders and Underwriters as Partners in Content Creation

When we accept funding or other support from an organization that will also play a role in the creation of content, we will not substitute that organization's editorial judgment for our own. We assure that our presentation of content produced through partnerships with funders meets our defined editorial standards. We disclose when a funder has joined us in the creation of content we present.

VII. Preventing Undue Influence

VIII. CONSISTENT EDITORIAL STANDARDS IN PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

Editorial partnerships and programming collaborations expand our capacity to serve, add to the perspectives we share with our audiences, and enhance the timeliness and relevance of our work.

We engage in ongoing efforts to build connections that deepen our knowledge of the communities we serve and our awareness of potential partners for projects.

We look for alignment in the motivation and goals of potential partners and collaborators and those of our own organization. We focus on principles, values, and practices of these potential partners and understand that differences in style or tone among our partners may contribute to our ability to serve the full community.

We maintain our editorial standards when partnering with other entities. We identify and articulate our principles, policies, and practices to all stakeholders in our partnerships and other collaborations. We require our partners to adhere to the same standards for any shared content, including transparency in the editorial process and the disclosure of content funders.

Our standards follow our content to other technologies and contexts. For example, hosting or facilitating a community discussion, town hall or forum requires editorial judgments using the same standards we apply in our broadcast or online activities.

We disclose our editorial partners and provide to the public a brief description of their, and our, roles and responsibilities.

IX. EMPLOYEE ACTIVITIES BEYOND THEIR PUBLIC MEDIA WORK

The actions of our employees, even when “off the clock,” affect public trust in our integrity, credibility, and impartiality. We encourage employees to uphold our integrity in their personal as well as their professional lives.

We respect the active personal lives of public media employees and their many interests, activities, and relationships. We are mindful, though, that employees’ activities beyond their public media work can affect our reputation and public trust. We therefore ask employees to integrate the principles and values of public media editorial integrity into their personal lives.

All WOSU Public Media Employees Should:

Aspire to high standards of integrity and ethics in their personal lives, including dealings with friends and associates, public behavior, and use of social media.

Be alert and sensitive to conflicts of interest between personal interests and their professional public media responsibility as employees of WOSU Public Media.

Make a distinction between communications that are part of professional public media responsibilities and all other communications.

Exercise careful judgment about, limit, or in some cases forgo, engaging in partisan activities or advocacy regarding controversial issues of public importance.

Follow University guidelines and procedures related to work outside of WOSU including obtaining authorization prior to engaging in external work that may be considered a conflict of interest.

IX. Employee Activities Beyond Their Public Media Work

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The WOSU Public Media Code of Editorial Integrity is part of a national initiative to advance principles, policies, and practices of editorial integrity throughout public media. Further information about the national initiative including discussion papers and additional project documents, are available at <http://pmintegrity.org>.

Funding for the Public Media Editorial Integrity Project was provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Any substantive changes in this Code will be communicated to all parties below and reconsidered for endorsement as required.

Endorsement of WOSU Public Media Code of Editorial Integrity:



Melinda Church
Vice President
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The Ohio State University
Representing the University



Dale Heydlauff
President
WOSU Friends Advisory Board

Endorsed by unanimous vote of
the Friends of WOSU Board on
March 5, 2014



Thomas Rieland
General Manager
WOSU Public Media

Representing the staff of
WOSU Public Media

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