

Following is a new NPR News Code of Ethics and Practices document that I've now adopted as final, effective February 25, 2004. These standards apply to materials created internally, as well as those contributed to NPR by member station reporters, independent producers, and other freelancers.

The last time NPR published a policy on News Division ethics and practices was in 1992's *Sound Reporting*. Since then, ethical issues had been addressed on an *ad hoc* basis, relying on well-established principles as situations arose. Given the growth of NPR, the public radio audience, and changes in technology, we were overdue for an update, which NPR journalists and those who contribute to NPR programming can refer when necessary.

The material in this code was drawn from a number of sources. Much of it is based on policy memos on specific issues that I posted over recent years as well as the range of issues that have crossed my desk during my time as Managing Editor and Vice President. I have also reviewed and drawn liberally (sometimes verbatim) from the ethics codes of other news organizations including *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, Dow Jones, Society for Professional Journalists, American Society of Newspaper Editors, the CBC and CNN. NPR News Division managers, the Office of the General Counsel, NPR staff, and an AFTRA working group were also consulted during the document's development.

This document is consistent with the principles stated in the recently published "Independence and Integrity II" ethics guide (available at <http://www.cpb.org/radio/ethicsguide/EthicsGuideII.pdf>) that was commissioned by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and recently released. It is, of course, more specific to NPR News, but both may be useful in thinking about ethical issues and journalistic practices.

The success of an ethics and practices code depends upon the extent to which we, as a community of journalists, embrace common values and standards. This document is an effort to articulate those values and standards. Its purpose is not to catch people up in a web of rules; its purpose is to ensure that NPR upholds its reputation for fairness and integrity in coverage of the news.

In the end, it is about trust. I believe strongly that by embracing the standards in this document, we will never have to worry about losing the bond of trust we have established with so many public radio listeners.

Bruce Drake

Vice President for News

NPR News Code of Ethics and Practices

I. Statement of purpose

Credibility.

As a news organization we are always testing and questioning the credibility of others. We have to stand that test ourselves.

The purpose of having a code of ethics and practices is to protect the credibility of NPR news programming by ensuring high standards of honesty, integrity, impartiality and conduct of staff. We accomplish this by (a) articulating the ethical standards we observe in pursuing and presenting stories, (b) setting rules and policies that prevent conflicts of interest, (c) establishing guidelines for outside work and activities that may reflect on NPR, and (d) establishing policies and procedures to ensure that the activities of NPR that fall outside journalism – corporate underwriting, foundation funding, marketing and promotional activities – do not jeopardize our journalistic independence or involve NPR reporters, editors, hosts or producers in activities inappropriate to their role as journalists.

II. Who and what is covered

✓ This code covers all NPR journalists, defined as employees who report (including hosts and newscasters), edit or produce news programming. It also covers all senior News managers. It does not cover News administrative staff. The code applies to all platforms for NPR News content, including Online.

— The code also applies to material provided to NPR News by independent producers, member station reporters and freelance reporters. NPR News expects its outside contributors to be free of conflicts of interest on stories they cover, to be fair and accurate, and to pursue stories in a manner consistent with the ethical journalism principles stated in this code. There will be instances where provisions of this code are not applicable to an outside contributor (a freelancer who primarily does arts coverage, for example, may not in some situations be subject to the prohibition on making contributions to political campaigns). Supervisors will make these judgments on a case-by-case basis and, if necessary, in consultation with the Vice President for News. Because contributors in this category are not NPR employees, the remedy for dealing with a conflict of interest or other violation of the principles of this code is rejection of the offered material as well as any future story proposals similarly affected by the conflict. As with NPR News employees, outside contributors must disclose potential conflicts of interest when they accept an assignment or make a story pitch, and NPR editors must make sufficient inquiries of those persons to satisfy themselves that the contributors have complied with this code.

III. Statement of principles

Our coverage must be fair, unbiased, accurate, complete and honest. As NPR journalists, we are expected to conduct ourselves in a manner that leaves no question about our independence and fairness. We must treat the people we cover and our listeners with respect.

- **Fairness** means that we present all important views on a subject – and treat them even-handedly. This range of views may be encompassed in a single story on a controversial topic, or it may play out over a body of coverage or series of commentaries. But at all times the commitment to presenting all important views must be conscious and affirmative, and it must be timely if it is being accomplished over the course of more than one story.
- **Unbiased** means that we separate our personal opinions – such as an individual’s religious beliefs or political ideology – from the subjects we are covering. We do not approach any coverage with overt or hidden agendas.
- **Accuracy** means that each day we make rigorous efforts at all levels of the newsgathering and programming process to ensure our facts are not only right but also presented in the correct context. We make every possible effort to ensure commentaries are correct in assertions of fact. We attempt to verify what our sources and the officials we interview tell us when the material involved is argumentative or capable of different interpretations. We are skeptical of all facts gathered and report them only when we are reasonably satisfied of their accuracy. We guard against errors of omission that cause a story to misinform our listeners by failing to be complete. We make sure that our language accurately describes the facts and does not imply a fact we have not confirmed.
- **Honesty** means we do not deceive the people or institutions we cover about our identity or intentions, and we do not deceive our listeners. We do not deceive our listeners by presenting the work of others as our own (plagiarism), by cutting interviews in ways that distort their meaning, or by manipulating audio in a way that distorts its meaning, how it was obtained or when it was obtained. The same applies to photographs used on NPR Online. Honesty means owning up publicly and quickly to mistakes we make on air.
- Treating the people we cover and our listeners with **respect** means we recognize the diversity of the country and world on which we report, and the diversity of interests, attitudes and experiences of our audience. We approach subjects in an open-minded, sensitive and civil way.

IV. Conflicts of interest

1. Conducting ourselves in a manner that inspires confidence in us as independent and fair means avoiding actual and apparent conflicts of interest or engaging in outside activities, public comment or writing that calls into question our ability to report fairly on a subject.
2. A conflict of interest in its simplest dictionary term is a conflict between the private interests and the professional responsibilities of a person in a position of trust. An operative word in this sentence is “trust.” All of us are in positions of trust when it comes to both our audience and the people and institutions that we cover. To maintain that trust requires that there be no real or perceived overlap between the private interests and opinions of NPR journalists and their professional responsibilities.
3. An employee covered by this code has the responsibility to disclose potential conflicts of interest. Revealing a conflict of interest after an individual has already participated in coverage where such a conflict exists or appears to exist is can be extremely damaging to the reputation of NPR. NPR journalists must, at the time they are first assigned to cover or work on a matter, disclose to their immediate supervisor any business, commercial, financial or personal interests where such interests might reasonably be construed as being in actual, apparent or potential conflict with their duties. This would include situations in which a spouse, family member or companion is an active participant in a subject area that the NPR journalist covers. In the financial category, this does not include a journalist’s investment in mutual funds or pension funds that are invested by fund managers in a broad range of companies. The supervisor will decide whether the interests create an actual conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict. In making these decisions, supervisors should feel free to consult with senior News Division managers and/or the Office of General Counsel.

V. Outside work, freelancing, speaking engagements

1. The primary responsibility of NPR journalists is to gather, write, edit or produce news for NPR and not work in direct competition with NPR. An example of competing with NPR would be breaking a story for another news outlet before reporting the story for NPR.
2. NPR journalists must get written permission for all outside freelance or journalistic work. Requests should be submitted in writing to the employee’s immediate supervisor. Approval will not be unreasonably denied if the proposed work will not discredit NPR, conflict with NPR’s interests, create a conflict of interest for the employee or interfere with the employee’s ability to perform NPR duties. Supervisors must respond within seven days of receiving a request.

3. NPR journalists may not engage in public relations work, paid or unpaid. Exceptions may be made for certain volunteer nonprofit, nonpartisan activities, such as participating in the work of a church or synagogue or charitable organization, so long as this would not conflict with the interests of NPR in reporting on activities related to that charity. When in doubt, employees should consult their supervisor.
4. In general, NPR journalists may not do outside work for government or agencies principally funded by government, or for private organizations that are regularly covered by NPR. This includes work that would be done on leaves of absence. There may be instances in which such work will be approved after consultation with the journalist's supervisor.
5. NPR journalists may not ghostwrite or co-author articles or books with people they cover, or write reports – such as annual reports – for government agencies, institutions or businesses that we cover.
6. NPR journalists must get approval from the Managing Editor or Vice President of News for speaking to groups that might have a relationship to a subject that NPR may cover. Generally, NPR journalists may not speak at corporation or industry functions. NPR journalists also may not speak in settings where their appearance is being used by an organization to market its services or products, unless it is marketing NPR or its member stations' interests, and then only as permitted in Section IX, Item 5 (below). NPR journalists are permitted to engage in promotional activities for books they have written (such as a book tour), although they are expected to get approval from their supervisors on scheduling.
7. NPR journalists may only accept speaking fees from educational or nonprofit groups not engaged in significant lobbying or political activity. Determining whether a group engages in significant lobbying or political activity is the responsibility of the journalist seeking permission, and all information must be fully disclosed to the journalist's supervisor.
8. NPR journalists may not speak to groups where the journalist's appearance might put in question his or her impartiality. Such instances include situations where the employee's appearance may appear to endorse the agenda of a group or organization.
9. NPR journalists must get permission from the Managing Editor or the Vice President for News and Information to appear on TV or other media. It is not necessary to get permission in each instance when the employee is a regular participant on an approved show. Permission for such appearances may be revoked if NPR determines they raise questions about the journalist's impartiality.

10. In appearing on TV or other media, NPR journalists should not express views they would not air in their role as journalists on NPR's programs. They should not participate in shows that encourage punditry and speculation rather than fact-based analysis.
11. Any NPR journalist intending to write a non-fiction book or TV or movie script or other guiding documents for non-radio productions based in whole or substantial part on assignments they did for NPR must notify NPR in writing of such plans before entering into any agreement with respect to that work. NPR will respond within 14 days as to whether it has any objections to the project.
12. NPR journalists considering book projects or TV or movie productions based on stories that they have covered must be careful not to give any impression they might benefit financially from the outcome of news events.

VI. Personal gain, gifts, freebies, loaned equipment or merchandise, etc.

1. NPR journalists may not accept compensation, including property or benefits of any kind, from people or institutions they cover. NPR journalists may accept gifts of token value (hats, mugs, t-shirts, etc.). Unsolicited items of significant value will be returned with a letter thanking the sender but stating our policy on gifts. NPR journalists pick up the check when they can (i.e., they are not wined and dined by sources); NPR journalists pay for our own travel in accordance with NPR's travel policy. There are certain instances – such as conferences and conventions – where food is provided as a convenience for the press as a whole, and in such instances it is acceptable to take advantage of this. In addition, NPR journalists may accept paid travel and meals for speaking engagements and awards ceremonies that are approved under the standards in Section V of this document.
2. NPR journalists must conduct themselves at all times in a manner that leaves no grounds for belief, or even the appearance, that information they have gathered on the job has been used for personal gain, financial or otherwise.
3. NPR journalists may not use any nonpublic information acquired at work for personal gain, or use their association with NPR for personal gain. No NPR journalist may disclose information acquired by NPR to anyone inside or outside of NPR if the intent is to use that information for personal or institutional gain. This prohibition does not apply to accepted journalistic practices, such as sharing information as a member of a news "pool."
4. NPR journalists pay their own way in newsgathering, except in unusual circumstances (like going into battle with the military). The Managing Editor or Vice President for News must approve any exceptions. NPR journalists may accept free passes to movie screenings, performances or similar activities that are attended for the purpose of doing reviews or stories for the air.

5. NPR journalists cannot sell items like books, CDs, etc., that are received at NPR for review. They belong to NPR. They may be distributed to staff for their personal use (which may include donations to charities) after they are no longer needed.
6. NPR journalists cannot keep any equipment or items of value provided by a company for test-use for story purposes. Such items must be disclosed to the journalist's supervisor and are to be disposed of in accordance with the ethical practices stated in this document, which usually means returning such items to the provider.

VII. Ethical conduct in coverage of news

1. Plagiarism is an unforgivable offense. NPR journalists do not take other peoples' work and present it as our own.
2. NPR News puts its highest value on firsthand news gathering and confirmation of facts, as opposed to relying on material from other sources (AP, other newspapers and networks, etc.)
3. NPR journalists must take special care in the use they make of information from wire service stories, reports by other broadcast news organizations, newspaper clips or articles in other publications. No material from another source should ever be included verbatim, or substantially so, without attribution.
 - Wire services: There is one category of quotation from wire services where it is acceptable to use quotes without attribution. That is where an AP or Reuters story is about some public event – like a press conference, speech by a public official in a public setting, an official statement of a government agency, a congressional hearing, and the like. In those cases, we reasonably expect that AP and Reuters are reliable conveyors of those quotes in the same way we regard the transcript services we use for these events. However, reporters and editors must use caution and check source material if there is reason to believe that a quote has been inaccurately reported or has been taken out of its proper context.
 - When using material from newspaper stories, NPR journalists must double-check “facts” and other material gleaned from those stories. Too often, incorrect information is passed down from one news story to another because of the failure of one news organization to get it right. NPR should never pass on errors in this way.

4. NPR journalists are generous in giving credit to other news organizations for stories that demonstrate enterprise or contain exclusive information. If their story inspires us to replicate it, we should give credit even if we use different sources and materials. If there is any doubt about whether to credit another news organization, ask the Managing Editor.
5. NPR journalists must treat the people they cover fairly and with respect. They always keep in mind that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort, and they weigh that against the importance of the story. NPR journalists show sensitivity when seeking or using interviews of those affected by tragedy or grief. They show special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced or unsophisticated sources or subjects, or individuals who have difficulty understanding the language in which they are being interviewed.
6. There are also legal considerations when dealing with minors – anyone under the age of 18. If you interview a minor, you must obtain written or recorded permission from the minor's parent or legal guardian before using the audio. In fact, you cannot identify the minor in any way (by name, description, location, etc.) without permission. Only if the minor is not individually identifiable – for example, the sound of a gaggle of children on a playground – do you not need to get permission. Many editors have the release forms for use in such circumstances; they also are available on the nprshare drive at “\NPR Forms\CONTRACTS\Minor Interview Release.” If there are other more routine instances in which a reporter wishes to use audio from a minor who is identified when permission has not been obtained, the reporter or his/her supervisor should consult the Office of General Counsel to determine whether that might be permissible.
7. NPR journalists think carefully about the boundaries between legitimate journalistic pursuit and an individual's right to privacy. We recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need to know can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.
8. NPR journalists make sure actualities, quotes or paraphrases of those we interview are accurate and are used in the proper context. An actuality from an interviewee or speaker should reflect accurately what that person was asked or was responding to. If we use tape or material from an earlier story, we clearly identify it as such. We tell listeners about the circumstances of an interview if that information is pertinent (such as the time the interview took place, the fact that an interviewee was speaking to us while on the fly, etc.). Whenever it's not clear how an interview was obtained, we should make it clear. The audience deserves more information, not less. The burden is on the NPR journalist to ensure that our use of such material is true to the meaning the interviewee or speaker intended.

9. Journalism should be conducted in the open. NPR journalists do not misrepresent themselves: NPR journalists disclose who they are and don't pose as law enforcement officials, investigators or other such officials. There will be occasions not to declare our profession but rather to seek information as a member of the public working in places to which the general public has access, such as stores, public buildings, etc.
10. NPR journalists do not use hidden microphones, recorders or cameras except in unusual circumstances. Occasionally information that serves an important journalistic purpose, such as in reporting on illegal, antisocial or fraudulent activities, cannot be obtained by more open means. In such circumstances, approval must be obtained from a senior News supervisor and the General Counsel's office *before* any taping or photographing takes place. NPR journalists do not record phone calls without permission.
11. If there is a question of legality in pursuit of a story, NPR journalists should consult their supervisors and the Office of General Counsel. NPR has lawyers available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to assist NPR journalists. If you have any question about the legality of your conduct, contact your supervisor, who will contact a lawyer. If you cannot reach a supervisor, you may contact a lawyer directly. News Operations has the home and cell phone numbers of NPR legal staff. The numbers also can be found in the NPR Phone List in ENPS (go to the "Managing Editor" location; the list is in the "NPR Phones" subfolder).
12. NPR journalists do not pay for information from sources or newsmakers. They do not allow sources or interviewees to dictate how a topic will be covered, or which other voices or ideas will be included. They do not agree to submit questions in advance unless a specific instance is approved by the Managing Editor, Vice President of News or designee. If questions are submitted in advance, this will be disclosed in our coverage.
13. NPR journalists do not sign non-disclosure agreements, except in the rarest of circumstances. Exceptions to this rule must be approved by the Vice President of News and the General Counsel. NPR journalists respect embargoes on news unless the circumstances surrounding the embargo make adherence to it inappropriate, such as where the information has already surfaced elsewhere or a strong public interest requires the disclosure to place other news in the proper context.
14. Although NPR journalists do agree to talk to sources on background when necessary, NPR's strong preference is to have people on the record. Before any information is accepted without full attribution, reporters should make every reasonable effort to get it on the record. If that is not possible, reporters should consider seeking the information elsewhere.

15. When reporters quote anonymous sources, the editor or producer of that story has an obligation to satisfy him/herself that the source is credible and reliable, and there is a journalistically justifiable reason to let that person speak without attribution. This obligation also pertains to situations where individuals ask that their real names be withheld. The editor or producer has a twofold responsibility: (1) to make a judgment about whether it is editorially justified to let the person speak anonymously or under cover of a pseudonym or partial description, and (2) to satisfy him/herself that this person is who the piece says s/he is. An editor should never be in the position of having to verify these things after a story has aired and a question is raised about it. If a pseudonym is used, the reporter must disclose this in the story.
16. When NPR journalists attribute information in a story to a “source” or “sources,” it is assumed that these are the NPR journalists’ sources and that they have obtained the information firsthand. If this is not the case, and the sources are ones quoted by other news organizations, then those sources must be attributed to those other news organizations.
17. NPR journalists do not show scripts in advance or preview pieces to any person not affiliated with NPR. An NPR journalist may review portions of a script or read back a quotation to assure accuracy. An NPR journalist may also play audio or read transcripts of an interview to a third party if the purpose is to get that party’s reaction to what another person has said.
18. Our corrections policy is to correct substantive errors of fact in a timely way. If a reporter, host, editor or producer believes NPR got something wrong – or that there was a serious defect in a piece – s/he has an affirmative responsibility to get that on the table for investigation and possible correction. Many times NPR learns these things when someone outside brings an error to its attention. That is one natural way of finding out. But if NPR journalists have reason to believe there was a significant error, they should not wait for it to be pointed out. NPR journalists should err on the side of caution in checking corrections, clarifications or retractions with the General Counsel before they air or are posted Online if there is any possibility the material in question poses a legal liability.
19. A reporter or host should make clear when an interview has begun or has ended so there is no question about what is or isn’t for broadcast, or what is on the record or not.
20. Archival audio or audio that was obtained from a past story must be identified as such if it is used in a new piece. The listener should not be left to think that any archival or previously obtained audio was gathered in the context of the current piece. As an example, a story updating a controversy surrounding an individual would be misleading if it included new assertions of fact but only used past statements by that individual and failed to identify them as such.

21. In general, the same ethical and editorial standards apply to online journalism that apply to radio journalism, although there are unique considerations pertaining to Online. Those considerations will be defined in a separate document to be developed by NPR Online in consultation with NPR News.
22. NPR's SOC policy is either to SOC out from the place where the reporter is filing or, if the reporter is no longer there, to SOC out generically ("Joe Smith, NPR News") and establish the "place" of the story in the intro and body of the story itself.
23. NPR does not name victims of sexual assaults. There will at times be exceptions – such as certain instances when a victim goes public with his/her identity – and NPR editors will judge these instances on a case-by-case basis.

VIII. Politics, community and outside activities

1. NPR journalists may not run for office, endorse candidates or otherwise engage in politics. Since contributions to candidates are part of the public record, NPR journalists may not contribute to political campaigns, as doing so would call into question a journalist's impartiality in coverage.
2. NPR journalists may not participate in marches and rallies involving causes or issues that NPR covers, nor should they sign petitions or otherwise lend their name to such causes, or contribute money to them.
3. NPR journalists may not serve on government boards or commissions.
4. NPR journalists may sit on community advisory boards, educational institution trustee boards, boards of religious organizations or boards of nonprofit organizations so long as NPR does not normally cover them and they are not engaged in significant lobbying or political activity. Such activities should be disclosed to the Managing Editor or designee, and NPR may revoke approval if it believes continued service will create the appearance of a conflict of interest or an actual conflict.
5. When a spouse, family member or companion of an NPR journalist is involved in political activity, the journalist should be sensitive to the fact that this could create real or apparent conflicts of interest. In such instances the NPR journalist should advise his or her supervisor to determine whether s/he should recuse him or herself from a certain story or certain coverage.

IX. Underwriting; foundation grants; advertising, marketing and promotion

1. A firewall will be maintained between NPR journalists and funders. While staff will inevitably end up talking to experts and officials who work at foundations that fund us (and their grantees), we may not discuss coverage planning with grant-making officials.
2. The Vice President of News will designate individuals who will serve as contacts with funders for grant-making purposes or other communications.
3. NPR journalists may not read funding credits on air.
4. If NPR reports on an organization or individual who funds us, we will disclose that relationship on air if the subject of the report is directly related to the thrust of the grant we received.
5. When authorized by the Vice President of News, NPR journalists may take part or be asked to take part in promotional activities or events involving supporters of NPR, such as our coordinated fund drives and public radio audience-building initiatives.

X. Application and enforcement of this Code

1. Application and enforcement of this Code is the responsibility in the first instance of every NPR journalist. This responsibility extends to both him/herself and to every other NPR journalist with whom he/she works. We should feel free to guide ourselves by offering suggestions to our peers to help them comply with their obligations under this Code.
2. Editors and producers have special responsibility for application of this Code to matters they are editing or producing. For each story that is produced, they should be satisfied that the standards of this Code have been met.
3. NPR journalists who do not comply with the Code may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination. Disciplinary action against those journalists covered by the AFTRA contract will be consistent with the contract.

XI. Miscellaneous

1. We do not enter journalism contests or competitions when they are sponsored by groups that have an interest in influencing our coverage. All entries for contests or competitions must be approved by the Managing Editor or designee.
2. NPR journalists should not speak on behalf of NPR, or its policies and practices, unless authorized to do so by appropriate company officials. All press inquiries about NPR policies and practices must be directed to NPR's Communications Department.
3. Generally, NPR journalists may not endorse products or provide blurbs for books, movies or performances using their NPR identification. The Vice President for News may make exceptions to this rule, such as when the author of a book is a colleague of the blurb-writer. However, permission will be denied in other circumstances, such as when the author is a politician or someone the NPR journalist covers. Blurbs drawn accurately and in context from material that has been on our air are permissible.
4. NPR journalists must not turn over any notes, audio or working materials from their stories or provide information they have observed in the course of their journalistic activities to government officials or parties involved in or considering litigation. If such materials or information are requested pursuant to governmental, administrative or other legal process, NPR journalists should immediately consult their supervisors and the General Counsel.
5. NPR owns material that has been collected or produced by NPR journalists in the course of their duties, irrespective of whether it has been distributed on our air outright, and it may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of NPR.
6. The provisions of this code are subject to the employment and other policies made generally applicable to all NPR employees.