

Ethical Guidelines for Editorial Staff of Wisconsin Public Radio and Television

This document identifies Wisconsin Public Radio and Wisconsin Public Television's Ethical Guidelines as they apply to journalists, those who control content with public policy implications, those who deliver news on-air and those senior managers who report to the Directors of WPT, WPR, and BAMI. Supervisors should make clear to individual affected staff that they are subject to these guidelines. Individuals who are uncertain as to whether this document pertains to them must consult with their supervisor. Broader ethical guidelines for all employees are captured in a separate document.

Because no document or policy guideline can anticipate every circumstance, staff should become familiar with this document and the Code of Ethics of Editorial Integrity as context for day to day decision making. The Code has been embraced by WPR and WPT journalists as a statement that reflects institutional values and as broad context for these guidelines.

Good decision making relies on knowledge of ethical guidelines and organizational practices, good judgment and context. To retain familiarity with these concepts and their application staff and supervisors should review these policies and practices periodically. These guidelines will be reviewed at least annually or more often as needed in the wake of changing communication platforms (i.e. social media) to assure that WPT and WPR employees have the frame of reference they need to make good decisions in unpredicted and sometimes challenging circumstances. As they apply to affected positions these guidelines will be provided to prospective employees upon hiring.

Public Broadcasting and the Public Trust

The reputation of public media rests on public trust; in many ways, trustworthiness is public media's most valuable asset. The public must be confident that Wisconsin Public Radio and Wisconsin Public Television content is not influenced by outside interests, commercial pressures, political influences or the personal agendas of its staff. To maintain the public's confidence and good will and to achieve its public service mission, all Wisconsin Public Radio/Television platforms—broadcasting, online, print, and in-person—must be held to high standards of accuracy, impartiality, independence, honesty and integrity. Our responsibilities extend to preserving the widespread recognition of the fairness of our news and public affairs programming and the neutrality of the organization and of staff responsible for content. These obligations necessarily supersede the personal interests of individual staff, whose actions must be beyond reproach and who must continually strive to maintain these standards and to avoid undermining or jeopardizing the public's perception of public media.

WPT and WPR recognize the rights of staff for freedom of expression and association. As private individuals and within parameters of these guidelines, staff are free to be creatively and civically engaged in their communities and to earn income in ways separate from their employment at UWEX. We acknowledge, too, that what we do outside of our professional roles can affect the public's trust in public media. Complications arise when personal interests conflict with professional responsibilities or when there are gray areas where it is difficult to know the right thing to do in a specific situation. Always keeping in mind the primacy of the

good reputation of public media, we must rely on institutional guidelines about ethical practice and good judgment to guide us in addressing real or perceived conflicts of interest when they arise.

Ethics Standards for Wisconsin Public Television and Wisconsin Public Radio

Wisconsin Public Television (WPT) and Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR) adhere to the ethical and editorial policies of the State of Wisconsin, the University of Wisconsin System and UW-Extension. WPT and WPR also operate within the guidelines and practices of the FCC, PBS, NPR, CPB, The Code of Ethics of Editorial Integrity and other professional organizations, such as those guiding the practice of journalism. Links to many of these policies are provided at the end of this document. Those who are, or may be affected by these guiding documents should maintain routine familiarity with them.

All employees of BAMI are bound by the Code of Ethics of the UW System or as classified staff, a portion of which is loosely reiterated here: Every member of the staff at the time of appointment makes a personal commitment to professional honesty and integrity to best ensure continued confidence of the people of this state in the University of Wisconsin state agencies and its personnel. It is a violation of this commitment for staff to seek financial or other types of gain for themselves, their immediate families or organizations with which they are associated through activities that conflict with the interests of the university, or WPR/WPT. Members of staff retain their rights as citizens to interests of a personal or economic nature. The purpose of these guidelines is to prohibit only those activities that result in a conflict between the personal interests of a staff member and his or her responsibilities to the UW System and to WPR/WPT. We must distinguish between those minor and inconsequential conflicts that are unavoidable in a free society and those conflicts that are substantial and material and must be avoided. (Code of Ethics, UWS Chapter 8 and ER-MRS Chapter 24). University guidelines, as they apply to WPR and WPT employees' unique responsibilities within an electronic media organization are summarized in a separate document entitled "WPR and WPT Staff Ethics."

This document does not intend to reiterate or summarize these codes, practices and guidelines but rather to provide discussion and information on several ethics and work issues that are pertinent specifically to WPR and WPT. This includes activities that occur within and outside of the scope of employment but they all relate to the credibility of WPT and WPR.

As noted, certain WPT and WPR staff are subject to a higher threshold because they have professional responsibilities that can cause them to forego exercise of individual rights if exercising those rights creates conflict with the organization's mission and success. These guidelines were developed with the assumption that employees of public broadcasting strive in the daily activities to do the right thing. We also recognize that how to do the right thing isn't always obvious and that we may need some assistance to maintain consistent ethical practices.

No one document can cover every possibility or anticipate all situations; however, this document is one way of clarifying our commitment to ethical practices.

Relationship of Public Broadcasting Roles to Ethical Guidelines

It is assumed and expected that as individuals and as an institution we act responsibly and ethically. For some the expression of “responsible and ethical practices” extends to our personal lives to the degree that individual actions may be seen publicly and may cause reasonable people to doubt the independence and integrity of our work. This “duty of care” can obligate us in ways that impact the exercise of our rights as private individuals to participate in public political activities or to associate with political groups or groups with strong advocacy positions.

And while the specific standards and expectations may vary among different staff the principles remain the same for all employees.

- Journalists, producers of content related to public policy issues, content decision makers, journalists, including reporters on-air news announcers, talk show hosts and producers and Executive staff (those who report to the Directors of BAMI, WPR and WPT) and those who shape our public information and advocacy efforts may not participate in public political activities, or public expressions of political or public policy opinions.
- All employees are expected to represent the highest individual standards of behavior at work and in their personal lives.
- Under no circumstances may any WPR and WPT employees engage in political activities at work. Except in the course of professional responsibilities, WPR and WPT employees may not engage in politically charged discussions with donors, corporate sponsors or programming partners whether at work or on their own time.

OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

Protecting Credibility

What we say and do, both on the job and in public, matter. Here are some basic questions we should ask ourselves regularly: “Are my actions congruent with the various policies that guide the staff of WPT and WPR and the public media industry.” “Will my professional credibility, the credibility and standing of WPT or WPR or the body of work be harmed by my actions? Will they be harmed if my actions are made public?”

We are committed to making every effort to avoid an ethical breach by asking employees to:

- know the policies that guide our organizations
- disclose to supervisors or other appropriate individuals when the situation indicates
- be alert and sensitive to situations that have potential to compromise your or the organizations’ integrity

CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICIES FOR WISCONSIN PUBLIC BROADCASTING

Conflict of Interest Due to Political Activity

In many ways, political activity and freedom of speech present the thorniest ethical issues about which conflicts of interest may arise. Public broadcasting encourages and benefits from having a workforce of active, involved members of the community. At the same time, we must be sensitive to conflicts of interest, either real or perceived, between our responsibilities as Wisconsin Public Broadcasting employees and our actions as private individuals. Because we receive government and public funding, and because our organizations provide programming about public policy issues, we are legitimately subject to a high degree of scrutiny about what we produce and our professional (and sometimes personal) practices. Real or perceived conflicts of interest may arise when public broadcasting employees actively engage with or support political parties or campaigns or causes (including making individual financial contributions), or run for public office. For example, it is clearly inappropriate for a reporter who covers political issues to publicly endorse a candidate. Staff who may be considering public service through elected office must consult with their supervisor. No staff with editorial responsibilities may run for partisan public office and simultaneously continue in their editorial position.

Abstaining from activities and disclosure as the situation requires

Disclosure is also key to ethical behavior. If avoidance of a situation isn't possible or if it's a gray area or if it's in the past, you should immediately disclose your action to your supervisor. For example, if you are a contributor to the Sierra Club or the National Rifle Association (NRA) and are assigned in an editorial capacity to work on a story related to environmental protection, you must disclose this.

In many cases, publicly acknowledging a potential conflict will mitigate or eliminate the appearance of conflict. For example, when the UW system President appears on *Here and Now* or *The Joy Cardin Show*, we acknowledge on the air that WPT and WPR are, in part, licensed to the University of Wisconsin, so that informed viewers may best judge the integrity of the interview. Determination about the nature, application and repetition of on-air disclosure is subject to sound professional judgment.

The following examples are guidelines for various staff depending on their role within the organization:

- While voting is a wholly private matter, wearing political or advocacy lapel buttons at work, putting up political cartoons, stickers or posters on your office door are public activities and therefore unacceptable at WPT and WPR. If your position is not editorial or executive in manner, and therefore allows you to be involved with a political activity, it must be done on your time. No WPT/WPR employee may wear WPT or WPR logo wear when engaging in political activity, as your participation could be mistaken to imply public broadcasting's support of your activity.

WPT and WPR staff with editorial and executive responsibilities are expected to refrain from signing petitions, writing letters to the editor, speaking at public meetings, donating to candidates or political parties, posting yard signs, etc., as each relates to a political or public policy issue, because doing so could suggest that a journalist or reporter has a clear bias on

an issue, or that WPT/WPR has a point of view on a policy issue. An exception to this guideline is for those senior executive staff that are expected or required, based on their job duties, to take positions on policy or funding issues that directly impact public broadcasting. Federal funding to CPB and FCC actions are examples of issues which senior executive staff may make public pronouncements. For other non-editorial and non-executive staff it may be acceptable to sign petitions, write letters to the editor or speak up in public meetings where public policy issues are discussed. It would be unacceptable to identify yourself as a public broadcasting employee in those situations. Your opinion may be perceived as our official position or may cause others to infer that WPR/WPT has a political point of view.

- Separating family advocacy and political activity from your own actions poses some unique challenges. Care must be taken to avoid public association with political issues, parties and candidates if you are in an editorial or executive position. Family members are not subject to the same restrictions as staff requiring careful attention to the distinctions between our own activities and those of others.

All staff need to be mindful of how family activity can impact how employees are perceived. For example, according to the university, bumper stickers on the family car parked in a university lot are permitted; however, public broadcasting staff would want to avoid driving a car (belonging to a spouse, partner, friend) with a political or to an interview, field taping or donor visit. Should family members desire to donate to a political advocacy or political campaign they should do so from a separate account and in their individual names.

Though they may not be manifestly political, many issues are partisan and controversial. Public broadcasting journalists, producers and policy makers must be particularly vigilant about prospective potential conflicts given their outward facing roles. If you have engaged with or provided public support for Planned Parenthood or Wisconsin Right to Life in the past, this would have created a conflict for editorial staff assigned to report about abortion.

In general most other public broadcasting staff may engage in political activities on their own time using their own resources; however in addition to editorial and senior executive staff other prominent WPR and WPT staff whose job places them in the role of representing us to the public must consult with their supervisor before participating in political activities. Direct reports must consult the Director of BAMI, WPR or WPT. Corporate development and senior fundraising staff must advise appropriate supervisors. Under some circumstances staff may be reassigned to work on subject areas distinct from their personal affiliations.

Employees who do not normally fall into editorial or management categories staff must be mindful that involvement in specific WPR/WPT projects may, for a time, put them within the ranks of those who must either consult with managers or refrain from political activities. To help interpret these gray areas, employees should consider whether the credibility and standing of public broadcasting or themselves would be harmed if their actions were to be made public, e.g., mentioned in a newspaper or posted on an Internet site in the context of their professional work. It is always better to err on the side of “restraint and disclosure.”

Public broadcasting editorial and executive staff, along with publicly engaged development staff, have the responsibility to fully disclose to their supervisors current or past donations, memberships, or activities related to public policy that might be expected to bring a challenge to their impartiality or endanger the public's trust in WPR/WPT. Supervisors may determine if such activities will result in a reassignment and/or may request a written explanation of the individual's involvement. For example, a marketing staff member who volunteers for an environmental organization should disclose this to their supervisor before working on a project about ground water quality.

Use of Personal Social Media

Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter have become an integral part of everyday life for millions of people around the world. The line between private and public activity has been blurred by these tools; information from your Facebook page, your blog entries, and your tweets - even if you intend them to be personal messages to your friends or family - can be circulated beyond your intended audience. This content, therefore, represents you and WPT/WPR to the outside world as much as a news story or talk show does. As in all of your work, the guidelines described in this document should guide you in your use of social media.

Recognize that everything you write or receive on a social media site is public. Any blog, comment or “Facebook like” may be widely seen. Anyone with access to the web can get access to your activity on social media sites. And regardless of how careful you are online, your professional and your personal life overlap.

As noted above, some activities may be especially problematic for senior executives and employees with responsibility for editorial content -- particularly politically charged content -- where fairness and the perception of independence and fairness are required. First and foremost --we should do nothing that could undermine our credibility with the public, damage WPT/WPR’s standing as an impartial source of information, or otherwise jeopardize our reputation.

Journalists and senior executives may not advocate for political, public policy or other polarizing issues online. This extends to or using social media in any form (including your Facebook page or a personal blog) to express personal views on a political or other controversial issue that you could not include for WPT/WPR broadcast or online publication. The exception for this is the “living room” rule: we are all free to discuss and explore any issue in our homes, with our family and friends. Private communications using personal technology and taking place behind security firewalls (e.g., person to person text, or e-mail-or a private message in Facebook) are the electronic equivalent of your living room.

The terms of service of a social media site apply to what you post and gather on that site. The terms might allow for material that you post to be used in a different way than you intended. Also, your simple participation – “friending” or “liking”-- in some online groups could be seen to indicate that you endorse their views and used inappropriately.

Social networking websites may offer opportunities for research related to public policy issues or public representatives. For example, a state representative's web page may provide an effective resource for understanding her/his policy positions, travel calendar, etc. Joining online groups may help us gather journalistic information, but we must use caution in making sure to have a balance in "friends" enlisted in research efforts (ex: Recall Governor Walker Facebook group and I support Governor Walker Facebook group.) Care must be taken that participation in such sites does not inadvertently create a perception of affiliation with candidates or those holding office, political parties, etc.

Contributing to and Fundraising for Non-Political Organizations

Nothing in these ethical guidelines should deter staff from contributing to non political charitable and non-profit organizations, except to note that many organizations list their donors in newsletters, online and in their annual reports, so your contribution to that organization will be public record. In most cases this is inconsequential. In some situations, it might call into question your impartiality when working on a project. These situations are best reviewed with your supervisor. Fundraising for other organizations may run counter to professional responsibilities of some development staff and Executive staff. Consultation with supervisors is essential.

Beyond volunteer work, we are occasionally asked to serve on a board, sometimes because our position in public broadcasting is advantageous to that organization. Here, the same principles apply as for other potential conflicts of interest, especially if you are asked to serve on the board of a partisan or advocacy organization. Those working in journalism and public affairs programming and senior executives may not serve on boards of partisan organizations or those that lobby for partisan public policy issues.

Conflict of Interest, Fundraising Ethics and General Workplace Ethics

In addition to the guidelines outlined in this document all staff of WPR and WPT are subject to other ethical guidelines that concern topics such as Conflict of Interest, Fundraising Ethics and General Workplace Ethics outlined in a separate document. ([See WPR and WPT Ethical Guidelines](#)).

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have questions, concerns, suggestions please contact your supervisor, or the divisional Human Resources Director who can facilitate a discussion.

UWEX, UW System and State of Wisconsin Policies

UWEX guidelines

<http://www.uwex.edu/secretary/policies/section7/chapter8.pdf>

UWEX Chapter 8/code of ethics, see 8.03 (1) (a) and 8.03 (1) (b)

UW system guidelines

<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/code/uws/uws.html>

UW System Code of Ethics; click on Chapter 8, then scroll to UWS 8.03(1) (b)

State guidelines State of WI-Office of State Employment Relations; see section ER-MRS 24.04 (2) (b)

<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/code/er-mrs/er-mrs024.pdf>

Media Guidelines

National Public Radio ethics policy

<http://ethics.npr.org/>

PBS Editorial & Funding Standards

CPB Regulations

WPR

<http://www.wpr.org/intranet/>

WPT

G:\WPT Infoshare\Ethics Policies

Principles of Editorial Integrity

http://pmintegrity.org/pm_docs/CodeofEditorialIntegrityforLocalPublicMedia-Apr2012update.pdf