

KUOW Mission: To create and serve a more informed public.

Firewall Policy

The term “firewall” is a useful metaphor that represents a protective barrier that is not impenetrable. It exists to maintain the highest level of journalistic integrity to preserve the public’s trust in KUOW. It is a process to ensure our reporting and coverage are independent and not influenced by funders, politicians, or others with an agenda. The firewall requires *continuous dialogue and examination* and allows editorial and business departments to work together toward the achievement of our shared mission.

INDEPENDENCE, INTERACTING WITH FUNDERS. Our journalism is made possible by diverse funding sources, including donations from members of the public, grants from foundations and government agencies, sponsorships and business support. While we value all who support our work, those who fund us do so in the knowledge that our journalism serves only the public.

We believe our strength as an organization is premised solely on high-quality, independent journalism in the public interest. All KUOW employees are committed first and foremost to that service.

At KUOW, the journalists – including senior news managers – have full and final authority over all journalistic decisions. The Chief Content Officer, and those she designates, hold the final ability to veto any funder that may pose a conflict. We will strive to err on the side of caution. Our integrity is precious and once tarnished, is hard to reclaim.

At KUOW all departments of the organization work together toward the goal of supporting and protecting our journalism. This means that the leadership of content communicates with our business support and development departments to support and sustain our current operation and identify areas where we hope to expand our reporting. It also means we may take part in promotional activities or events such as coordinated fund drives, listener support spots and public radio audience building initiatives. **KUOW journalists interact with funders only to further our editorial goals, not to serve the agendas of those who support us.**

STORYTELLING, NOT SELLING. Journalists are invaluable resources to describe the value, impact and character of our journalism. Members of the Content Division may be called upon to talk about the work with those who might support it, whether over the air during a pledge drive or in person during a meeting with prospective funders. But in all staff/department interactions with potential funders, we observe this boundary: **We’re there to tell our story, not to discuss the agendas of our supporters.** This means we may describe the goals and ambitions of our editorial agenda, promote the value of our work and the worthiness of supporting it, or recount what we’ve experienced in our reporting.

We understand that donors may express opinions about the subjects we cover. Regardless of what department we are in, we don’t assent to those opinions or express our own.

Furthermore, it is the job of all KUOW journalists to apply the same journalistic rigor to ideas and conversations they may be directly presented with or inadvertently overhear.

These are nuanced lines to tread, and no KUOW journalist should feel compelled to participate in meetings with prospective donors or foundations. Part of the job of business development is making our funders aware that our content decisions and makers will be editorially blind to their support – that we'll conduct our journalism with no favor or slight to them or their interests. They also vet potential supporters to make sure their interests don't present an actual or implied conflict with our mission.

WHEN APPROPRIATE, DISCLOSE FUNDING RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN OUR COVERAGE. At times, KUOW reports stories about corporations, organizations or individuals who support our programming. We are scrupulous in disclosing funding relationships that might foster the perception that our supporters have influenced our work. At the same time, a laundry list of disclosures would clutter our programs, rendering appropriate disclosures meaningless, so we avoid rote disclosures each time a supporter is mentioned in our coverage. Whether or not to disclose a funder during the course of a particular story is a careful judgment made by editors and the News Director on a case-by-case basis.

DON'T ALLOW SOURCES TO DICTATE OUR COVERAGE. We don't allow sources to dictate how a topic will be covered, or which other voices or ideas will be included in the stories we cover. Nor do we pay for information from sources or newsmakers.

OUR SUPPORTERS DO NOT DICTATE OUR COVERAGE. KUOW greatly appreciates the financial support it receives from individuals, from foundations and from corporations. Their support is essential. At the same time, KUOW makes its own decisions about what stories to cover and how to report them. Neither the people nor organizations who support KUOW financially, the sources we come in contact with, our competitors nor any others outside KUOW's newsroom dictate our thinking.

VETTING COMMUNITY SOURCES. KUOW has a strategic interest in hearing feedback from our audience about the stories we cover. In doing so, we will be mindful of vetting specific questions for conflicts of interest.

CONSIDERATION OF BUSINESS SUPPORTERS IN THE NEWS. KUOW will exercise careful consideration when deciding who can offer support to its news programming. In particular, the Business Sponsorship Team will work closely with the Chief Content Officer to carefully assess potential business supporters whose agenda is designed to bring about a specific political outcome, to influence public policy on controversial matters or to possibly change public perception of their business during a crisis.

TRANSPARENCY. Managers may answer questions about our firewall in different ways. **The common denominator is not so much the nature of the answer but the nature of the questioning process we go through.** That questioning process needs to be both thorough and transparent so that staff, the funding community and consumers all understand how decisions were reached. We embrace open, continuous dialogue.