

## **WLRN Editorial Standards and Content Evaluation**

The Editorial Standards set forth in this memorandum address the primary principles and standards by which WLRN evaluates content to be distributed in its broadcasts, on its Website, or in publications. These principles and standards primarily pertain to the criteria by which WLRN evaluates content for distribution, but also applies to the processes by which content is produced, either by or for WLRN or any other entity whose content might be used by WLRN.

WLRN is responsible and accountable for the quality and integrity of the content it distributes. If WLRN concludes that content fails to satisfy its overall standards of quality or any applicable standard or practice, WLRN may reject the content for distribution. It is important as members of the WLRN management team that these standards and policies are followed and adhered to.

### **Editorial Standards and Content Evaluation**

Precision in editorial standards is especially difficult because it's impossible to articulate every criterion that might enter into the evaluation of the quality and integrity of particular content. Moreover, a criterion considered mandatory for straight news reporting may not always be applicable to public affairs forums, documentaries or dramatic programs.

Content evaluation is an art, not a science. The process requires professional judgments about the value of content in relation to a broad range of informational, aesthetic, technical, and other considerations. WLRN's task, therefore, is to weigh the merits of potential content and assure that, when viewed in its entirety, the content achieves the best balance among these considerations. These Standards and Policies embody the goals of integrity and quality to which WLRN aspires, recognizing that judgments about how these standards apply may differ depending on format or subject, and that not all content succeeds equally in satisfying all of these standards.

WLRN recognizes that the producers of informational content deal neither in absolute truth nor in absolute objectivity. Information is by nature fragmentary; the honesty of a program, Web site, or other content can never be measured by a precise, scientifically verifiable formula. Therefore, content quality ultimately

depends on each producer's professionalism, independence, honesty, integrity, sound judgment, common sense, open mindedness, and intention to inform, not to propagandize.

### **Fairness**

Fairness to the audience implies several responsibilities. Content must neither oversimplify complex situations nor camouflage straightforward facts. WLRN may reject a program or other content if WLRN believes that it contains any unfair or misleading presentation of facts, including inaccurate statements of material fact, undocumented statements of fact that appear questionable on their face, misleading juxtapositions, misrepresentations, or distortions.

WLRN will reject content if, in its judgment, the content unfairly treats people or misrepresents their views. Fair treatment of individuals generally requires that the words and actions of the people portrayed or identified are represented in a way that presents their strongest case, and gives individuals or organizations that are the subjects of attack or criticism an opportunity to respond. Fairness also requires the consideration of all relevant information and points of view.

### **Accuracy**

The honesty and integrity of informational content depends heavily upon its factual accuracy. Every effort must be made to assure that content is presented accurately and in context. Programs, Web sites, and other content containing editorials, analysis, commentary, and points of view must be held to the same standards of factual accuracy as news reports. A commitment to accuracy includes a willingness to correct the record if persuasive new information warrants a correction, and to respond to feedback and questions from audiences.

WLRN will strive to verify the accuracy of content in its productions. Producers of informational content must exercise extreme care in verifying information, especially as it may relate to accusations of wrongdoing, and be prepared to correct material errors. WLRN will reject content that, in its judgment, fails to meet WLRN's standard of accuracy.

### **Objectivity**

Along with fairness and accuracy, objectivity is the third basic standard by which WLRN evaluates the content it distributes.

Objectivity encompasses more than the neutral presentation of news and information. Objectivity also refers to the process by which a work is produced, including work that involves analysis or, as a result of reporting, arrives at conclusions. Those who develop content for public broadcast must enter into any inquiry with an open mind, not with the intent to present a predetermined point of view. Beyond that, for a work to be considered objective, it should reach a certain level of transparency. In a broad sense, this spirit of transparency means the audience should be able to understand the basics of how the producers put the material together. And when controversy is anticipated, producers should prepare to help audiences understand editorial decisions, particularly regarding anonymous sources of information. In the spirit of transparency, producers should be able to explain the derivation of a point of view. One aspiration implicit in the idea of transparency is that an audience might appreciate and learn from content with which it also might disagree.

Opinion and commentary are different from news and analysis. When a program, segment, or other content is devoted to opinion or commentary, the principle of transparency requires that opinion be clearly labeled as such. Any content segment that presets only like-minded views without offering contrasting viewpoints should be considered opinion and should identify who is responsible for the views being presented.

## **Balance**

WLRN seeks to present, over time, content that addresses a broad range of subjects from a variety of viewpoints. WLRN may, however, choose to consider not only the extent to which the content contributes to balance overall, but also the extent to which specific content is fairly presented in light of available evidence.

Where appropriate, WLRN may condition acceptance of content on the producer's willingness to further the goal of balance by deleting designated footage or by including other points of view on the issues presented or material from which the public might draw a conclusion different from that suggested by the content. Material to be added may range from a few words, to a complete content

segment, to an added episode in a series of programs, to the production of an entirely separate, new program. For online content, links to credible, high-quality, related resources may be used to provide access to additional information or viewpoints.

### **Responsiveness to the Public**

WLRN's commitment to the community it serves includes accountability and responsiveness. WLRN will answer audience questions and respond to criticisms about programs and content. Public feedback will be labeled as such, and standards – such as those relating to obscenity or personal attacks – will be applied.

### **Courage and Controversy**

WLRN seeks content that provides courageous and responsible treatment of issues, and honest reporting of social, political, and economic tensions, disagreements, and divisions. The surest road to intellectual stagnation and social isolation is to stifle the expression of uncommon ideas; today's dissent may be tomorrow's orthodoxy. The ultimate task of weighing and judging information and viewpoints is, in a free and open society, the task of the audience. Therefore, WLRN seeks to assure that its overall content offerings contain a broad range of opinions and points of view, including those from outside society's existing consensus, presented in a responsible manner and consistent with the standards set forth in these Standards and Policies.

### **Experimentation and Innovation**

WLRN seeks content that is innovative in format, technique, or substance. The absence of commercial considerations accords WLRN the freedom to experiment in ways not always tolerable in the commercial environment. Though standards of quality, substance, and public service always prevail, the potential for innovation can be fully realized only if WLRN is bold enough to take occasional risks.

### **Exploration of Significant Subjects**

Unlike their commercial counterparts, public television stations do not sell time for profit and are, therefore, free from the constraints that compel commercial broadcasters to pursue the largest audience. WLRN seeks programs that explore

significant subjects even if those subjects or their treatment may not be expected to appeal to a large audience.

### **Unprofessional Conduct**

WLRN expects producers to adhere to the highest professional standards. WLRN may reject content if WLRN has reason to believe that a producer has violated basic standards of professional conduct. Examples of unprofessional conduct by a producer include such things as plagiarism, fabrication, obtaining information by bribery or coercion, insensitivity to tragedy or grief, and real or perceived conflicts of interest such as accepting gifts, favors, or compensation from those who might seek to influence the producer's work.

### **Objectionable Material**

Responsible treatment of important issues may sometimes require the inclusion of controversial or sensitive material, but good taste must prevail in WLRN content. Morbid or sensational details, or material that is gratuitously offensive to general taste or manners (e.g., extreme violence, racial epithets, strong language, nudity, sexism), should not be included unless it is 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. If WLRN concludes that the exclusion of such material would distort an important reality or impair the content's artistic quality, WLRN may accept the content, provided it carries appropriate notice to the viewer. Conversely, WLRN may reject content that, in its judgment, needlessly contains objectionable material that compromises the content's quality or integrity.