



## **CODE OF ETHICS AND PRACTICES FOR JOURNALISTS AT WUWM MILWAUKEE PUBLIC RADIO**

*As individuals, ethical standards are part of our core personality and guide us throughout our lives, especially when we think that no one is paying attention.*

*As employees of the University of Wisconsin System, all WUWM staff members must comply with policies on conflicts of interest and ethical standards. These are outlined in separate documents. But as journalists, our listeners trust us to provide an honest portrayal of issues and events in all of our broadcasts. They need to know that our reporting is not influenced by outside interests, political influences or personal agendas.*

*This code draws liberally from the ethical guidelines adopted by the NPR Board of Directors as well as the work of the "Editorial Integrity for Public Media" project which engaged hundreds of executives and senior staff of public broadcasting organizations, faculty from schools of journalism, and advisers in the areas of philanthropy, community engagement, and new media.*

*This document governs the work of WUWM's editorial staff. Throughout this document, the word 'journalist' is used as a shortcut. This term, and this document, is intended to include those individuals who gather, edit, deliver or manage informational programming on our air and on digital platforms.*

Adopted November 2013

## **THE PRINCIPLES OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE PUBLIC TRUST**

Public media organizations contribute to a strong civil society and active community life, provide access to knowledge and culture, extend education, and offer varied viewpoints and sensibilities.

The freedom of public media professionals to make editorial decisions without undue influence is essential. It is rooted in America's commitment to free speech and a free press. It is reflected in the unique and critical media roles that federal, state, and local leaders – of both major political parties – have encouraged and respected across the years. It is affirmed by the courts.

Trust is equally fundamental. Public media organizations create and reinforce trust through rigorous, voluntary standards for the integrity of programming and services, fundraising, community interactions, and organizational governance.

These standards of integrity apply to all the content public media organizations produce and present, regardless of subject matter, including news, science, history, information, music, arts, and culture. These standards apply across all public media channels and platforms – broadcasting, online, social media, print, media devices, and in-person events.

Public media, individually and collectively:

Contribute to communities' civic, educational, and cultural life by presenting a range of ideas and cultures and offering a robust forum for discussion and debate.

Commit to accuracy and integrity in the pursuit of facts about events, issues, and important matters that affect communities and people's lives.

Pursue fairness and responsiveness in content and services, with particular attention to reflecting diversity of demography, culture, and beliefs.

Aim for transparency in news gathering, reporting, and other content creation and share the reasons for important editorial and programming choices.

Protect the editorial process from the fact and appearance of undue influence, exercising care in seeking and accepting funds and setting careful boundaries between contributors and content creators.

Encourage understanding of fundraising operations and practices, acknowledge program sponsors, and disclose content-related terms of sponsor support.

Maintain respectful and accountable relationships with individual and organizational contributors.

Seek editorial partnerships and collaborations to enhance capacity, perspective, timeliness, and relevance and apply public media standards to these arrangements.

Expect employees to uphold public media's integrity in their personal as well as their professional lives, understanding that employee actions, even when "off the clock," affect trust, integrity, credibility, and impartiality.

Promote the common good, the public interest, and these commitments to integrity and trustworthiness in organizational governance, leadership, and management.

## **KEY PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE OUR JOURNALISM**

### ***Accuracy***

Our purpose is to pursue the truth. Diligent verification is critical. We take great care to ensure that statements of fact in our journalism are both correct and in context. In our reporting, we rigorously challenge both the claims we encounter and the assumptions we bring. We devote our resources and our skills to presenting the fullest version of the truth we can deliver, placing the highest value on information we have gathered and verified ourselves.

### ***Fairness***

To tell the truest story possible, it is essential that we treat those we interview and report on with scrupulous fairness, guided by a spirit of professionalism. We make every effort to gather responses from those who are the subjects of criticism, unfavorable allegations or other negative assertions in our stories. What we broadcast and put online is edited for time and clarity. Whenever we quote, edit or otherwise interpret what people tell us, we aim to be faithful to their meaning, so our stories ring true to those we interview. In all our stories, especially matters of controversy, we strive to consider the strongest arguments we can find on all sides, seeking to deliver both nuance and clarity. Our goal is not to please those whom we report on or to produce stories that create the appearance of balance, but to seek the truth.

### ***Completeness***

We do our best to report thoroughly and tell stories comprehensively. We won't always have enough time or space in one story to say everything we would like or quote everyone we would wish to include. But errors of omission and partial truths can inflict great damage on our credibility, and stories delivered without the context to fully understand them are incomplete. Our journalism includes diverse voices that reflect our society and divergent views that contribute to informed debate. When we find that we can't deliver all the answers to important questions, we explain what we don't yet know and work to fill any gaps in our reporting.

### ***Honesty***

Journalists who conduct themselves honestly prove themselves worthy of trust. In the course of our work, we are genuine and candid. We attribute information

we receive from others, making perfectly clear to our audience what information comes from which source. We avoid hyperbole and sensational conjecture. We may sometimes construct hypotheticals to help explain issues and events, but we reveal any fabrication, and do not otherwise mix fiction with our news reporting. We edit and present information honestly, without deception, and we identify ourselves as WUWM journalists when we report.

### ***Independence***

To secure the public's trust, we must make it clear that our primary allegiance is to the public. Any personal or professional interests that conflict with that allegiance, whether in appearance or in reality, risk compromising our credibility.

### ***Impartiality***

We strive to report and produce stories that treat all views fairly. We aggressively challenge our own perspectives and pursue a diverse range of others, aiming always to present the truth as completely as we can tell it.

### ***Accountability***

We take full responsibility for our work, so we must always be ready and willing to answer for it. Just as careful attention to our sources makes a story stronger, careful listening to our public makes our journalism better. So we welcome questions or criticisms from our stakeholders and to the best of our ability, we respond. Mistakes are inevitable. When we make them, we correct them forthrightly, reflect on what happened, and learn from them.

### ***Respect***

Everyone affected by our journalism deserves to be treated with decency and compassion. We are civil in our actions and words, avoiding arrogance and hubris. We listen to others. When we ask tough questions, we do so to seek answers -- not confrontations. We are sensitive to differences in attitudes and culture. We minimize undue harm and take special care with those who are vulnerable or suffering. And with all subjects of our coverage, we are mindful of their privacy as we fulfill our journalistic obligations.

### ***Excellence***

Our journalism is most valuable when we marry important truths with engaging narrative. We take enormous pride in the craftsmanship of our storytelling and in the quality of the words, sounds and images we use to help illuminate the world. When we edit, it is to add impact and clarity to our journalism -- never to slant or distort. We don't allow what is sensational to obscure what is significant. We aspire to tell stories that rise above the maudlin and mundane, avoiding shallow sentimentality. Above all, we do our best to faithfully and powerfully convey the truth.

## **KEY PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE OUR JOURNALISTS**

WUWM journalists enjoy the right to robust personal lives, yet we accept some unique professional obligations and limitations. Because our words and actions can damage the public's opinion of WUWM, we comport ourselves in ways that honor our professional impartiality. We have opinions, like all people. But the public deserves factual reporting and informed analysis without our opinions influencing what they hear or see.

### **DISCLOSURE**

We are vigilant in disclosing to our supervisors any circumstances where our loyalties may be divided - extending to the interests of spouses and other family members - and when necessary, we recuse ourselves from related coverage. Under no circumstances do we skew our reports for personal gain, to help WUWM's bottom line or to please those who fund us. Decisions about what we cover and how we do our work are made by our journalists, not by those who provide WUWM with financial support.

### **POLITICAL ACTIVITY**

WUWM employees may not engage in any political activity at work unless it is directly related to their job duties. But as journalists, we also do not participate in any political party, campaign or cause (including making financial contributions). We do not run for public office.

WUWM employees vote. This is a private matter, but we do not wear political or advocacy buttons at work. You won't find political cartoons, stickers or posters at our work stations and offices.

Because we don't want our audience to know our individual views, we don't sign petitions or write letters to the editor. We don't speak at public meetings or post yard signs relating to a political or social issue.

It is possible that our family members become involved in campaigns or causes. But as WUWM journalists we make every attempt to distance ourselves from this activity. For example, we don't drive a family member's car to a news event if it has a political bumper sticker.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social networking sites allow us to put on display portions of our lives that often blur the lines between personal and professional activities. As journalists, we recognize that what we post is widely accessible to our friends as well as members of the public. This means, that WUWM journalists refrain from the same kind of political activity noted above in social media. Private communications on personal email accounts to friends and family are excluded as they are not accessible to the public.

## OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES

Because our primary responsibility is to gather, write, edit or produce news for WUWM we will not do work that is in direct competition with WUWM.

If we want to do outside freelance work that does not compete with WUWM, we must get written permission from our supervisor.

Because we are journalists, we do 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 WUWM in reporting on activities related to that charity. When in doubt, supervisors are consulted.

Supervisors will also approve any speaking engagements with organizations that might have a relationship to a subject that WUWM may cover.

From time to time, we may be asked to appear on TV or other media. We get permission from our supervisor so that there are no conflicts with our role at WUWM. During such appearances, we do not express views that would not air in our role as journalists on WUWM programs.

Plagiarism is an unforgivable offense. WUWM journalists do not take other peoples' work and present it as our own.

## **KEY PRINCIPLES THAT ESTABLISH OUR JOURNALISTIC FIREWALL**

A large and diverse group of funders supports our work, including many individuals, businesses, governmental entities, and foundations. Most of the funding we receive supports overall operations rather than specific programs or series. A diversity of sources, the number of contributors, and the unrestricted character of funds all reinforce the independence and integrity of our editorial process.

We give careful attention to contributions and grants that support specific programs, projects, and activities. We 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 do not accept funding of ongoing news and information programming from political parties and candidates for public office.

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.

As journalists who deal with a wide range of community issues, it is inevitable that we will talk with experts and officials who work at organizations that fund us. As a rule, we don't discuss any coverage planning with grant-making officials.

The General Manager will designate individuals who will serve as contacts with funders for grant-making purposes or other communications.

## **THE COMMON SENSE PRINCIPLE**

It is not possible for a document like this to address all possible situations that may occur. When an issue arises employees should discuss the matter with their supervisor. The supervisor should seek guidance from the general manager. The general manager may seek the guidance of others with expertise in journalist ethics. The decision of the General Manager is eligible for review by the Dean of the College of Letters and Science at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. WUWM employees who do not comply with the Code may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Additional information on the UW System Code of Ethics may be found at:

[www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/code/uws/uws.html](http://www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/code/uws/uws.html)

Click on Chapter 8 (Unclassified Staff Code of Ethics)