

WQLN Public Media Editorial Guidelines and Code of Ethics

1. FAIR, ACCURATE, AND BALANCED

- a. The fundamental principle of public radio is to address listeners as citizens and individuals, not as consumers. One goal of WQLN Public Media is to provide our listeners with a wide range of news and features on a wide range of topics, providing coverage for our 13-county listening area. We will focus on Erie County, where most of our listeners live. We will work proactively to ensure that we regularly include stories about what's happening in all of the regions we reach.
- b. Another goal is to present information that is accurate. We will not distort the facts, lie, slant, or hype. We will check facts; we will never make up quotes. We will separate opinion from fact. If we make errors, we'll correct them promptly, at a time when we are most likely to reach the listeners who heard the original mistake.
- c. A third goal is to present information that is fair and balanced. We will present both sides of each issue; this may be within a single story or in a series of stories. We will assume people are innocent until proven guilty. We will work to present stories from a diversity of viewpoints.
- d. With regard to balanced reporting, WQLN Public Media will aim to eliminate bias when reporting on matters of race, creed, religion, ethnic origin, gender, and sexual preference. We will identify people by race, creed or other group only when it is relevant to the story.

2. DEALING FAIRLY WITH SOURCES

- a. WQLN Public Media will use information only from trustworthy sources. We will follow NPR practice and make efforts to name those who provide information to news reports—except in cases where providing names could bring harm to the informant. If we promise confidentiality to a source, we will keep that promise. In all cases, we will respect the dignity and privacy of people we encounter when reporting stories. We will vigorously pursue public right-to-know laws when appropriate or as necessary.

3. AVOIDING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

- a. WQLN Public Media will choose news items and set priorities for broadcast based on accepted best practices in journalism. Staff will be aware of and guard against inappropriate pressure from non-news personnel. Our programming is not required or primarily intended to advance the WQLN Public Media perspective.
- b. WQLN Public Media will avoid conflicts of interest. We will not accept gifts or special favors; we will make no promises to provide coverage based on relationships; we will consider personal connections to community organizations when making assignments. We will not accept paid outside work that would conflict with or compromise the reputation of the television and radio stations for fair and balanced journalism. We will avoid political activity that would create a conflict of interest. And we will not use information gained while gathering news for personal gain.
- c. Staff has the responsibility to disclose to the station manager activities that might create a conflict of interest and challenge the public's trust.

- d. Staff will not use station equipment for personal purposes.

4. PRODUCTION CONSIDERATIONS

- a. Sources must always be told that they are being recorded. They must know why they are being recorded—what is the goal of the story. WQLN Public Media does not pay for interviews. In cases where travel presents a hardship, WQLN Public Media may offer the interviewee overnight accommodations, reimbursement for actual travel costs, and/or meals.
- b. Significant stories should be based on more than one source. In producing reports, WQLN Public Media will use sound according to NPR best practices. That is, we will not use sound in a misleading way, by presenting as spontaneous material that is staged or rehearsed, or recorded at a different time or place than it is presented as occurring.
- c. We will make audio editing decisions to keep the story faithful to actual events while advancing understanding of the story. Internal edits or the elimination of pauses are acceptable only if they would NOT alter the listener's perception or understanding of the material.
- d. Commentaries and analysis will be identified as such.
- e. WQLN Public Media will use copyrighted material such as music and the material of other broadcasters only with permission or according to the laws of fair use.
- f. We will not broadcast profanity or describe extreme violence or sexual assault unless it is an integral and necessary part of the story. In this case we will first give listeners an advisory as to the story's content.
- g. WQLN Public Media does not let sources check a script before broadcast.

5. WEB CONSIDERATIONS

- a. The reputation of WQLN Public Media is impacted by the way it is represented via its digital and social media outlets. Thus, it has an obligation to ensure that staff interacts on these platforms professionally and ethically, and that the content on its platforms is appropriate. Thus:
- b. We need to interact on social media sites with the understanding that all such communications are public. WQLN Public Media believes that all behavior online is public.
We should conduct ourselves on all digital/social media platforms with the understanding that our conduct reflects on the news organization.
- c. Journalism should be conducted in the open, regardless of the platform. Journalists using social media to find sources or pursue stories should identify themselves just as they would if they were working offline.
- d. The use of social media to break news should be done so with the same care as would be taken if a story were broadcast.
- e. We do not advocate for political or other polarizing issues online.
- f. No comments by visitors to any platform that WQLN Public Media controls (such as its website or blog) should be posted without review.
- g. All links that are published should be reviewed to make sure they are appropriate for WQLN Public Media (noncommercial, in good taste, accurate).

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