

# THE ETHICAL STANDARDS OF JOURNALISM

## PREAMBLE

The mission of the Fourth Estate is to contribute to a healthy society by fostering, supporting, and incubating a sustainable and vibrant free press.

The only sustainable free press is an ethical free press.

The Fourth Estate recognizes three core principles that are fundamental to the ethical practice of journalism:

## Reporting the **TRUTH** | Ensuring **TRANSPARENCY** | Serving the **COMMUNITY**

These three principles form the basis of a more detailed Code of Practice for anyone seeking to create ethical, principled journalism, regardless of their background, employment status, or means of delivery.

This code is equally relevant for professional journalists and for those outside the profession who are seeking to report honestly and fairly on the events and issues relevant to their community.

## ACCURACY

Accuracy, moreso than exclusivity or timeliness, is the overriding value of journalism.

- Ensure that all the facts in your work are accurate.
- Do not omit facts that are material to an understanding of what you are reporting on.
- Context is often critical to accurate reporting. Ensure that adequate context is provided.
- Clearly distinguish between fact and assertion or opinion.

## INDEPENDENCE

Independence from state control, business interests, market forces, or any other vested interest or outside pressure is a hallmark of dispassionate, critical, and reliable journalism. It bolsters legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of the public.

- Make your own editorial judgments based only on careful consideration of all the facts.
- Do not allow yourself to be influenced by political, sectional, or commercial interests.
- Declare and manage any conflicts of interest, including gifts, funding, advertising relationships, and free or discounted travel or services.

## IMPARTIALITY

Impartiality means not being prejudiced towards or against any particular ideology, idea, or preconception.

Impartiality requires fairness and balance that follows the weight of evidence: it allows the journalist to make sense of events through dispassionate analysis of all relevant facts and perspectives.

- Treat all facts the same, making editorial judgments and delivering analysis based only on the weight of evidence.
- Do not allow your own views, preferences, biases, or prejudices to affect your work. Set them aside.
- Do not simply recite lists of facts or engage in false balance: weigh the evidence and reflect that weight of evidence in your work.
- Aim to include an appropriate diversity of views, and accord those views the space warranted by their prominence and significance.

## INTEGRITY

Integrity in journalism ensures that people and organizations uphold the values of journalism, always strive to do the right thing in all situations, even to their personal or organizational detriment, and put their obligations to the public first.

- Treat those you deal with in your work with respect and courtesy.
- Always identify yourself as a journalist, unless withholding disclosure is essential to uncovering the truth in a matter of public importance.
- As far as possible, look for opportunities to “show your workings,” sharing with the public the underlying information you have gathered.
- The use of any form of secret information gathering (hidden cameras, secret recording devices, etc...) may be justifiable if it is essential to uncovering the truth in a matter of public importance.

- Provide anyone accused of misbehavior a reasonable opportunity to respond.
- Attribute information to its source unless that source needs to be protected to ensure the truth can be uncovered in a matter of public importance. Where a source needs anonymity, provide it.
- Do not plagiarize.

## HARM MINIMIZATION

Journalists must always remember that they are dealing with human lives. The potential for public good must sufficiently outweigh the potential for harm that may come from the activity of journalism.

- Be mindful that your work may contain content that causes harm. Carefully consider how you proceed to ensure that undue harm is not caused.
- Avoid the gratuitous use of offensive, confronting, or harm-inducing sounds, imagery, or words.
- Respect people’s reasonable rights to privacy unless they are outweighed by the need to report on a matter of public importance.
- Show sensitivity when dealing with children, victims of crime, or people who are especially vulnerable due, for example, to trauma, injury, illness, or other factors.

## ENGAGEMENT

Engagement with the public ensures that journalism remains open, accessible, collaborative, and participatory while keeping the journalist accountable to the highest standards of accuracy, independence, impartiality, and integrity.

- Your decisions on what work to do should be based on what is relevant and newsworthy to the community you serve.
- Establish and maintain open communications with the community.
- Seek input and ideas from the community before, during, and after completing your work.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is essential to the ethical practice of journalism and the maintenance of the public trust. Being accountable for news-gathering practices and reporting means making firm commitments and taking responsibility for your journalism and the journalism of your peers.

- Seek and carefully consider the feedback you receive from the community about your work.
- Respond constructively to any complaints, particularly those related to matters raised in relation to these standards.
- Where errors or potentially incomplete or misleading information is found, corrections or clarifications should be made promptly, prominently, and transparently.
- Where no errors or incomplete or misleading information is found, your work should not be altered or removed in any material way in response to pressure from outside interests.