

# Michigan Radio Ethics and Integrity Document

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The mission statement of Michigan Radio is as follows:

*The mission of Michigan Radio is to produce and distribute trusted content to inform, educate and entertain people who care about the State of Michigan and the world around them.*

The purpose of this journalistic independence and integrity document is to publicly elaborate on what it means to “distribute trusted content.”

Maintaining the journalistic independence and integrity of Michigan Radio is the responsibility of every staff member. This document was written by Michigan Radio management as an effort to articulate the staff’s shared values and standards that make up the station’s independence and integrity.

While Michigan Radio journalists share a special responsibility to abide by these values and standards, all staff members are expected abide by them in any situation in which they could be interpreted as representing the station.

This ethics policy also applies to independent producers, freelance reporters, consultants, and temporary employees who work for the station.

The material in this policy was drawn from a number of sources including (but not limited to): National Public Radio, The New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, WUNC, the Radio/Television/Digital News Association, the Society of Professional Journalists, and additional assistance from journalism faculty members at numerous universities. Many of the provisions in this ethics policy are in theirs as well, and there are some instances where we have adopted the same language from others because their wording was just right.

The process for developing this document included consultation with the station’s General Manager, Programming Management team, the University of Michigan’s Office of the Vice President for Communications, and Journalism Ethics professor Jan Leach from Kent State University.

No document can cover every situation, and this statement of journalistic independence and integrity is not intended to be a complete set of rules and regulations. Rather, it is a set of guidelines and a statement of shared values. When in doubt, employees should not be shy about asking questions. A robust, ongoing discussion of ethics and policy at all levels of the station is essential to producing consistently high-quality public service programming.

## Chapter 2: Fairness and Truth

There are several defining terms of what constitutes fairness at Michigan Radio. They all concern the way our programming relates to the subject matter of our on-air and online work, to the people we deal with while creating our stories, and to the audience which hears or reads them.

1. *Fairness* means that we present all important and credible views on a subject, and treat them evenhandedly. The range of views may be encompassed in a single story on a controversial topic, or it may play out over a body of coverage or series of stories and commentaries.
2. *Unbiased* means that we separate our personal opinions – such as an individual's religious beliefs or political ideology – from the subjects we are covering. We do not approach any coverage with overt or hidden agendas.
3. *Accuracy* means that we make rigorous efforts at all levels of the newsgathering and programming process to make sure our facts are not only right but also presented in the correct context. We make every possible effort to ensure commentaries are correct in assertions of fact. We attempt to verify what our sources and the officials we interview tell us when the material involved is argumentative or capable of different interpretations. We report statements as facts only when we are reasonably satisfied with their accuracy. We guard against errors of omission that cause a story to misinform our listeners by failing to be complete. We make sure that our language accurately describes the facts and does not imply a fact we have not confirmed.
4. *Honesty* means we do not deceive the people or institutions we cover about our identity or intentions in our process of gathering stories, and we do not deceive our listeners once we have the stories in hand. We do not deceive our listeners by presenting the work of others as our own (plagiarism), by editing interviews in ways that distort their meaning, or by manipulating audio in a way that distorts its meaning, how it was obtained or when it was obtained. The same applies to photographs we post. Honesty means owning up publicly to what we have aired and acting quickly to rectify mistakes we make on air or online or in public.
5. *Respect* means recognizing the diversity of the state and communities on which we report, and the diversity of interests, attitudes, and experiences of our audience. We approach subjects in an open-minded, sensitive and civil way. Michigan Radio journalists must treat the people they cover fairly and with respect. They always keep in mind that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort, and they weigh that against the importance of the story. Michigan Radio journalists show sensitivity when seeking or using interviews of those affected by tragedy or grief. They show special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced or unsophisticated sources or subjects, or individuals who have difficulty understanding the language in which they are being interviewed.

## Chapter 3: Sources

Plagiarism is an unforgivable offense. Michigan Radio journalists do not take other peoples' work and present it as their own.

1. *Crediting sources:* Michigan Radio journalists must take special care in the use they make of information from reports by other broadcast news organizations, newspapers, articles in other publications, or online sources and social media. No material from another source should ever be included verbatim, or substantially so, without attribution, unless it has been verified by Michigan Radio. Our journalists should give credit to other news organizations for stories that demonstrate enterprise or contain exclusive information. (Note: Wire services is one category where it is acceptable to use material without attribution.)

2. *Minors:* Michigan Radio reporters must consider legal issues when dealing with minors (generally defined as anyone under the age of 18) for audio interviews, photographs and video. An interview or use of an image of a minor about a sensitive subject requires us to secure permission from at least one of the minor's parents (preferably both) or a legal guardian.

Examples of sensitive subjects include academic cheating, sexual activity, involvement in gangs or crime, difficult family relationships, probation violation, pregnancy or parenthood, survivors of sexual abuse, mental health and similar topics that could have legal ramifications or lead to embarrassment. An interview or image of a minor in a special custodial situation, such as foster care, juvenile detention, or holding facilities for illegal immigrants, requires the consent of the person who has custody of the minor.

An audio interview on a non-sensitive topic (normal childhood activities, sports, books, movies, trips to the zoo, and the like) does not require consent. Generally however, any interview on school premises will require the permission of the school authorities.

In general, parental permission is not required in the following situations:

- Photographs of school, AAU, or other organized sports contests involving minors
- Photographs of unnamed children participating in large scale events such as protests, parades, crowd shots in public arenas, street photography involving multiple people

In cases where there is doubt about whether to get consent, contact your editor or the news director.

Photographers and video journalists should always be careful how and where they photograph and film young subjects. When a minor is the only person in an image, or the prominent person, we should make every effort to obtain parental permission before publishing the photograph.

When no parental permission has been obtained by the photographer, editors will weigh the news value of the photograph with the absence of parental permission in determining whether or not to use the photograph.

We do not need parental permission to run a child's photo if we have obtained the photo and rights to it elsewhere, such as a press release or public relations material provided to the newsroom.

3. *Privacy:* Michigan Radio journalists think carefully about the boundaries between legitimate journalistic pursuit and an individual's right to privacy. We recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need to know can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.

4. *Actualities:* Michigan Radio journalists make sure actualities, quotes or paraphrases of those we interview are accurate and are used in the proper context. An actuality from an interviewee or speaker should reflect accurately what that person was asked or was responding to. If we use audio or material from an earlier story, we clearly identify it as such.

5. *Representing ourselves:* Journalism should be conducted in the open. Michigan Radio journalists do not misrepresent themselves and should not pose as anyone other than themselves.

6. *Hidden microphones:* Michigan Radio journalists do not use hidden microphones, recorders or cameras except in unusual circumstances. Occasionally information that serves an important journalistic purpose, such as in reporting on illegal, antisocial or fraudulent activities, cannot be obtained by more open means. In such circumstances, written approval must be obtained from the News Director before any undisclosed taping or photographing takes place. Michigan Radio journalists do not record phone calls without notifying the people on the phone.

7. *Paying sources:* Michigan Radio journalists do not pay for information from sources or newsmakers.

8. *Off the record:* By our definition, off-the-record information cannot be used, either on the air, or online. But many sources, including some sophisticated officials, use the term when they really mean "not for attribution." We must be very careful when dealing with sources who say they want to be "off the record." If sources mean "not for attribution," Michigan Radio reporters and producers need to explain the difference and discuss what the attribution will actually be.

If sources really mean "off the record" as we define the term, then in most circumstances, we should avoid listening to such information at all. We do not want to be hamstrung by a source who tells us something that becomes unusable because it is provided on an "off the record" basis. Just as in granting anonymity, Michigan Radio reporters and producers should discuss with their editor or news director whether we will agree to go "off the record" with a source.

This is how Michigan Radio understands the terminology:

**On the record:** Everything in the conversation can be used and attributed to your source by name and job title.

**On Background/Not for attribution:** Essentially, all information received in these contexts can be quoted, but it cannot be attributed to the source by name. Instead, a general and vague title is used such as “University official” or “assistant to the governor.”

**Off the record:** No part of the conversation may be used or attributed in a story, but the information can be used as information or guidance to further our reporting. We may find another source or documentation to provide the information on the record.

9. *Anonymous sources:* Anonymous sources should only be used when there is no other way to get the information. The information should be significant. Journalists should not grant confidentiality if the information is trivial. The news director must approve the use of an anonymous source. The news director has an obligation to satisfy him/herself that the source is credible and reliable, and there is a journalistically justifiable reason to let that person speak without attribution. This obligation also holds where individuals ask that their real names be withheld. The news director has a twofold responsibility: (a) to judge whether anonymity (or a pseudonym) is justifiable, and (b) to satisfy him/herself that this person is who the piece says s/he is. No one should ever be in the position of having to verify these matters after a story has aired. If a pseudonym is used, the reporter must disclose this in the story.

Before granting confidentiality, it must be clear that the Michigan Radio journalist may reveal the source’s identity and information to supervisors and possibly to the station’s legal counsel. The agreement to keep a source confidential should be premised on truthfulness. If the source lies, the confidentiality agreement will be considered void. Sources will not be allowed to make personal attacks on others and remain anonymous.

Anonymity is typically only provided by Michigan Radio journalists if disclosing the identity of the source puts the source at risk of physical harm or ability to earn a livelihood.

10. *Previewing scripts:* Michigan Radio does not show scripts in advance or preview pieces to any person who is not a staff member of Michigan Radio. Michigan Radio journalists may review portions of a script or read back a quotation to assure accuracy, and may also play audio or read transcripts of an interview to a third party if the purpose is to get that party’s reaction to what another person has said. Michigan Radio journalists do not allow sources or interviewees to dictate how a topic will be covered, or which other voices or ideas will be included.

11. *Audio archives:* Archival audio or audio that was obtained from a past story must be identified as such if it is used in a new piece. The listener should not be left to think that any archival or previously obtained audio was gathered in the context of the current piece.

12. *Sound effects:* Michigan Radio journalists will use only authentic sound recorded at the stated location. We will not use canned sound effects unless for obvious comic or satirical purposes (for instance on a bloopers reel or for an April Fools piece or program), or unless they

are identified as pre-produced sound effects. Any questions as to the appropriateness of sound or sound effects should be taken to one's editor.

13. *Online:* The same ethical and editorial standards for radio journalism also apply to online journalism and professional blog posts of Michigan Radio journalists. Wherever relevant, permission to reproduce photographs, music, and any supplementary audio has been sought and gained; potentially libelous material and offensive language has been vetted through proper channels. The basic rule is this: if the content on the website were translated into a radio transmission, it has to pass the standards set out in these independence and integrity guidelines.

14. *Sexual assaults:* Michigan Radio does not name victims of sexual assaults without permission of the victim.

15. *Public access to interview notes, recordings, and copyrighted images:* Michigan Radio will provide, at no cost, copies of any Michigan Radio produced audio that aired as a broadcast or photographic image that was published online as long as the material is being used for educational or journalism purposes.

Permission will typically be granted to:

- Any NPR or public broadcasting affiliated news organization
- Schools and higher education institutions for instructional purposes
- News organizations with which Michigan Radio has ongoing content sharing agreements or collaborative projects

Requests for audio and photographs that fall outside the above guidelines will be determined on a case by case basis after consultation with the General Manager and University Counsel. Michigan Radio may deny permission if it believes the audio or image may be used out of context with the original reporting and presentation conducted by Michigan Radio.

The audio and images may not be sold or used for advocacy purposes or commercial/political advertisements.

These one-time uses of our materials are never a transfer of shared copyright. We will not provide the raw audio of full interviews or the notes taken by a reporter during an interview to sources or the public.

#### **Chapter 4: Editorial Independence**

Michigan Radio values editorial independence. To secure the public's trust, Michigan Radio must make it clear that our primary allegiance is to the public. Any interests that conflict with that allegiance, whether in perception or reality, risk compromising our credibility.

We do not write or edit stories reports to assist in the branding, public relations, messaging, institutional gain, of those who fund the station. Decisions about what we cover and how we do

our work are made by our journalists and editors, not by those who provide Michigan Radio with support.

Journalism's proud tradition of holding the powerful accountable provides for no exceptions. Michigan Radio's news operation must be free from all forms of interference designed to influence or regulate its content.

**The Michigan Radio newsroom and programming departments make all decisions on coverage.**

Michigan Radio greatly appreciates the financial and operating support it receives from individuals, foundations, corporations, granting agencies and the University of Michigan. Their support is essential.

However, Michigan Radio makes its own decisions about what stories to cover and how to report them.

The Michigan Radio newsroom and programming departments alone direct how a topic will be covered, and which voices or ideas will be included in our stories. We are committed to promptly correcting any factual errors – and to balanced presentation in the entirety of our coverage. While we are always willing to have conversations about the quality of a story and suggestions for improvement, under no circumstances can anyone, including a source or funder, demand the removal of, or changes to, a story or blog post.

Factual errors will always be corrected publicly and transparently. When disagreement over factual content occurs, individuals and institutions will be given the opportunity to make their criticisms and present their case as a comment we will add to a posted story, as all Michigan Radio broadcast stories are also located on our website.

Michigan Radio journalists will always acknowledge mistakes and correct them promptly and prominently. We will explain corrections and clarifications carefully and clearly.

**Coverage of Michigan Radio**

Michigan Radio journalists attempt to cover Michigan Radio the same way they would cover any other company or organization. Editorial decisions are made with an eye toward the news value of events at Michigan Radio just as editorial decisions are made regarding the news value of events at any other major business or institution.

Whenever possible, any coverage of news involving Michigan Radio itself should be handled by journalists with no involvement in the issue. All editors and others who were “part of the story” are recused.

Michigan Radio's news management will make any effort necessary to insure impartial reporting. In extremely rare cases, this could involve assigning independent reporter(s) and/or editor to handle a sensitive story

The ideal is that when Michigan Radio, or a journalist or staff member's actions or work are "news" — for good or bad — those who are involved in the assigning, reporting, editing and producing do not then play any part in the coverage.

Our ideal is simple: to cover any such story just as we would if it involved any organization, and to take all such actions necessary to ensure that is possible. Although we work for the University of Michigan, our loyalty is to the public.

### **Michigan Radio editors will inform their superiors of any potential important or controversial stories regarding the license holder**

Michigan Radio content producers (on all distribution platforms) are aware that some news stories regarding the University of Michigan will be seen by officials at the UM as "negative" stories. Michigan Radio does not avoid any newsworthy story but aims to cover the University of Michigan with the same editorial standards and vigor used to cover other major universities in our coverage area. When such stories are in production, newsroom and programming management will make reasonable efforts to inform the General Manager before the story is aired or published.

### **Chapter 5: Community Participation Guidelines**

Michigan Radio journalists, hosts, and news personnel (hereafter referred to as "journalists") may not run for office, endorse candidates or otherwise engage in politics. Since contributions to candidates are part of the public record, Michigan Radio journalists may not contribute to political campaigns, as doing so would call into question a journalist's impartiality in coverage.

Michigan Radio journalists may not participate in marches and rallies involving causes or issues that Michigan Radio covers, nor should they sign petitions or otherwise lend their name to such causes, or contribute money to them.

Michigan Radio journalists may not publicly display their support for a candidate or issue which we cover or may cover. This includes the display of lawn signs, bumper stickers, lapel pins, tshirts, etc.

Michigan Radio journalists may not serve on elected or appointed government boards or commissions.

Michigan Radio journalists MAY sit on community advisory boards, educational institution trustee boards, boards of religious organizations or boards of nonprofit organizations so long as Michigan Radio does not normally cover them and they are not engaged in significant lobbying or political activity. Such activities should be disclosed to the News Director or Program



Director, and Michigan Radio may revoke approval if it believes continued service will create the appearance of a conflict of interest or an actual conflict.

When a spouse, family member or partner of a Michigan Radio journalist is involved in political activity, the journalist should be sensitive to the fact that this could create real or apparent conflicts of interest. In such instances the Michigan Radio journalist should advise his or her supervisor to determine whether s/he should remove him or herself from a certain story or certain coverage.

## **Chapter 6: Social Media Guidelines**

Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter have become an integral part of everyday life for millions of people around the world. As Michigan Radio grows to serve the audience well beyond the radio, social media is becoming an increasingly important aspect of our interaction and our transparency with our audience and with a variety of communities. Properly used, social networking sites can also be very valuable newsgathering and reporting tools and can speed research and extend a reporter's contacts, and we encourage our journalists to take advantage of them.

The line between private and public activity has been blurred by these tools, which is why we are providing guidance. Information from a Michigan Radio journalist's Facebook page, a blog entry or tweets – even if intended as personal messages to your friends or family – can be easily circulated beyond the intended audience. This content, therefore, represents the journalist and Michigan Radio to the outside world as much as a radio story or story for the website.

First and foremost – Michigan Radio journalists should do nothing that could undermine credibility with the public, damage Michigan Radio's standing as an impartial source of news or otherwise jeopardize Michigan Radio's reputation.

Michigan Radio journalists must:

- Recognize that everything written or received on a social media site is public. Anyone with access to the web can get access to activity on social media sites. Regardless of how careful you are in trying to keep them separate, in your online activity, your professional life and your personal life overlap.
- Use the highest level of privacy tools available to control access to your personal activity when appropriate, but don't let that make you complacent. It's just not that hard for someone to hack those tools and make public what you thought was private.
- Conduct yourself in social media forums with an eye to how your behavior or comments might appear if they were called upon to defend them as a news organization. In other words, don't behave any differently online than you would in any other public setting.
- Remember that the terms of service of a social media site apply to what you post and gather on that site. The terms might allow for material that you post to be used in a different way than you intended. Additionally, law enforcement officials may be able to

obtain by subpoena anything you post or gather on a site without your consent -- or perhaps even your knowledge.

- Remember the same ethics rules as apply offline also apply to information gathered online.
- Identify yourself as a Michigan Radio journalist when you are working online. If you are acting as a Michigan Radio journalist, you must not use a pseudonym or misrepresent who you are.
- Always explain to anyone who provides you information online how you intend to use the information you are gathering.
- When possible, clarify and confirm any information you collect online by later interviewing your online sources by phone or in person.
- While widely disseminated and reported, material gathered online can be just as inaccurate or untrustworthy as some material collected or received in more traditional ways. As always, consider and verify the source.
- Apply the same attribution rules to content gathered online as other content.
- Must not advocate for political or other polarizing issues online. This extends to joining only one side of online groups or using social media in any form (including your Facebook page or a personal blog or retweets) to express personal views on a political or other controversial issue that you could not write for the air or post on Michigan Radio.org.
- Realize that social media communities have their own culture, etiquette, and norms, and be respectful of them.

## **Chapter 7: Corrections and requests to unpublish**

Michigan Radio's corrections policy is to correct substantive errors of fact in a timely way. If a reporter, host, editor or producer believes Michigan Radio got something wrong – or that there was a serious defect in a piece – s/he has an affirmative responsibility to get that defect or error on the table for investigation and possible correction.

At times Michigan Radio will learn these things when someone outside brings an error to our attention. But if Michigan Radio journalists have reason to believe there was a significant error, they should not wait for it to be pointed out. Journalists should err on the side of caution in checking corrections, clarifications or retractions with the News Director before they air or are posted online if there is any possibility the material in question poses a legal liability.

Michigan Radio will almost always refuse requests to “unpublish” a story or a portion of a story or the name of a source in a story. We will update a story if it is necessary, and fix factual errors (with a note explaining what was fixed and why), but if the information is correct, it will not be removed.

The only exceptions are those where Michigan Radio believes the continued existence of a story online, or a portion of that story, places an individual in imminent and specific danger. No story

or portion of a story may be unpublished without the permission of both the news director and the program director.