



Alaska Public Media News Code of Ethics and Practices

Revised February 2010; updated to include “Alaska Public Media” November 2013

I. Statement of purpose

As a news organization we are always testing and questioning the credibility of others. We have to stand that test ourselves.

The purpose of having a code of ethics and practices is to protect the credibility of Alaska Public Media news programming by ensuring high standards of honesty, integrity, impartiality and conduct of staff. We accomplish this by (a) articulating the ethical standards we observe in pursuing and presenting stories, (b) setting rules and policies that prevent conflicts of interest, (c) establishing guidelines for outside work and activities that may reflect on Alaska Public Media, and (d) establishing policies and procedures to ensure that the activities of Alaska Public Media that fall outside journalism that is, corporate underwriting, foundation funding, marketing and promotional activities, do not jeopardize our journalistic independence or involve Alaska Public Media reporters, editors, hosts or producers in activities inappropriate to their role as journalists.

II. Who and what is covered

This code covers all Alaska Public Media journalists, defined as employees who report (including hosts and newscasters), edit or produce news programming. It also covers all news managers. The code applies to all platforms for Alaska Public Media News content, including television, radio, web or any other method of distribution of news content.

The code also applies to material provided to Alaska Public Media News by independent producers, member-station reporters and freelance reporters. Alaska Public Media News expects its outside contributors to be free of conflicts of interest on stories they cover, to be fair and accurate, and to pursue stories in a manner consistent with the ethical journalism principles stated in this code. There will be instances where provisions of this code are not applicable to an outside contributor (a freelancer who primarily does arts coverage, for example, may not, in some situations be subject to the prohibition on making contributions to political campaigns). These judgments will be made on a case-by-case basis and in consultation with the Director of News. Because contributors in this category are not Alaska Public Media employees, the remedy for dealing with a conflict of interest or other violation of the principles of this code is rejection of the offered material as well as any future story proposals similarly affected by the conflict. As with Alaska Public Media News employees, outside contributors must disclose potential conflicts of interest when they accept an assignment or make a story pitch, and Alaska Public Media staff must make sufficient inquiries of those persons to satisfy themselves that the contributors have complied with this code.

III. Statement of principles

Our coverage must be fair, unbiased, accurate, complete and honest. As Alaska Public Media journalists, we are expected to conduct ourselves in a manner that leaves no question about our independence and fairness. We must treat the people we cover and our listeners with respect.

Fairness means that we present all important views on a subject and treat them even-handedly. This 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 commentaries. But at all times the commitment to presenting all important views must be conscious and affirmative, and it must be timely if it is being accomplished over the course of more than one story.

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.

Accuracy means that each day we make rigorous efforts at all levels of the newsgathering and programming process to ensure our facts are not only right but also presented in the correct context. We make every possible effort to ensure everything that we accept or produce for broadcast/distribution is 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 are skeptical of all facts gathered and report them only when we are reasonably satisfied of 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.

Honesty means we do not deceive the people or institutions we cover about our identity or intentions, and we do not deceive our audiences. We do not deceive our audiences by presenting the work of others as our own (plagiarism), by cutting interviews in ways that distort their meaning, or by manipulating video or audio in a way that distorts its meaning, how it was obtained or when it was obtained. Honesty means owning up publicly and quickly to mistakes we make on air.

Treating the people we cover and our listeners with respect means we recognize the diversity of the subjects 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.

IV. Conflicts of interest

1. Conducting ourselves in a manner that inspires confidence in us as independent and fair means avoiding actual and apparent conflicts of interest or engaging in outside activities, public comment or writing that call into question our ability to report fairly on a subject.

2. A conflict of interest in its simplest dictionary term is a conflict between the private interests and the professional responsibilities of a person in a position of trust. An operative word in this sentence is "trust." All of us are in positions of trust when it comes to both our audience and the people and institutions that we cover. To

maintain that trust requires that the private interests of Alaska Public Media journalists do not conflict with their professional responsibilities.

3. An employee covered by this code has the responsibility to disclose potential conflicts of interest. Revealing a conflict of interest after an individual has already participated in coverage where such a conflict exists or appears to exist is can be extremely damaging to the reputation of Alaska Public Media. Journalists must, at the time they are first assigned to cover or work on a matter, disclose to the Director of News any business, commercial, financial or personal interests where such interests might reasonably be construed as being in actual or potential conflict with their duties. This would include situations in which a spouse, family member or companion is an active participant in a subject area that the journalist covers. In the financial category, this does not include a journalist's investment in mutual funds or pension funds that are invested by fund managers in a broad range of companies. The Director of News will decide whether the interests create an actual conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict.

V. Outside work, freelancing, speaking engagements

1. The primary responsibility of Alaska Public Media journalists is to gather, write, edit or produce news for APTI and not work in direct competition with Alaska Public Media. An example of competing with APTI would be breaking a story for another news outlet before reporting the story for Alaska Public Media.

2. Alaska Public Media journalists must get written permission for all outside freelance or journalistic work, with the exception of filing breaking news to NPR, PRI and other public radio entities.

3. Alaska Public Media journalists may 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 Alaska Public Media in reporting on activities related to that charity. When in doubt, employees should consult with the Director of News.

4. In general, Alaska Public Media journalists may not do outside work for government or agencies principally funded by government, or for private organizations that are regularly covered by Alaska Public Media. This includes work that would be done on leaves of absence. There may be instances in which such work will be approved after consultation with the Director of News.

5. Alaska Public Media journalists may not ghostwrite or co-author articles or books with people they cover, or write reports, such as annual reports, for government agencies, institutions or businesses that we cover.

6. Alaska Public Media journalists must get approval from the Director of News for speaking to groups that might have a relationship to a subject that Alaska Public Media may cover. Generally, Alaska Public Media journalists may not speak at corporation or industry functions. Alaska Public Media journalists also may not speak in settings where their appearance is being used by an organization to market its services or products, unless it is marketing Alaska Public Media or its member stations' interests, and then only as permitted in the appropriate section that follows. Alaska Public Media journalists are permitted to engage in promotional activities for books

they have written (such as a book tour), although they are expected to get approval from the Director of News on scheduling.

7. Alaska Public Media journalists may only accept speaking fees from educational or nonprofit groups not engaged in significant lobbying or political activity. Determining whether a group engages in significant lobbying or political activity is the responsibility of the journalist seeking permission, and all information must be fully disclosed to the Director of News.

8. Alaska Public Media journalists may not speak to groups where the journalist's appearance might put in question his or her impartiality. Such instances include situations where the employee's appearance may appear to endorse the agenda of a group or organization.

9. Alaska Public Media journalists must get permission from the Director of News to appear on TV or other media. It is not necessary to get permission in each instance when the employee is a regular participant on an approved show. Permission for such appearances may be revoked if Alaska Public Media determines they raise questions about the journalist's impartiality.

10. In appearing on TV or other media, Alaska Public Media journalists should not express views they would not air in their role as journalists on Alaska Public Media programs. They should not participate in shows that encourage punditry and speculation on their part rather than fact-based analysis.

11. Any Alaska Public Media journalist intending to write a non-fiction book or TV or movie script or other guiding documents for non-radio productions based in whole or substantial part on assignments they did for Alaska Public Media must notify Alaska Public Media in writing of such plans before entering into any agreement with respect to that work. Alaska Public Media will respond within 14 days as to whether it has any objections to the project.

VI. Personal gain, gifts, freebies, loaned equipment or merchandise

1. Alaska Public Media journalists may not accept compensation, including property or benefits of any kind, from people or institutions they cover. Alaska Public Media journalists may accept gifts of token value (hats, mugs, t-shirts, etc.). Unsolicited items of significant value will be returned with a letter thanking the sender but stating our policy on gifts. Alaska Public Media journalists pick up the check when they can (i.e., they are not wined and dined by sources); Alaska Public Media journalists pay for their own travel in accordance with Alaska Public Media travel policy, except in unusual circumstances (e.g., military transport). The Director of News must approve any exceptions. There are certain instances such as conferences and conventions where food is provided as a convenience for the press as a whole, and in such instances it is acceptable to take advantage of this. In addition, Alaska Public Media journalists may accept paid travel and meals for approved speaking engagements and awards ceremonies.

2. Alaska Public Media journalists must conduct themselves at all times in a manner that leaves no grounds for belief, or even the appearance, that information they have gathered on the job has been used for personal gain, financial or otherwise.

3. Alaska Public Media journalists may not use any nonpublic information acquired at work for personal gain, or use their association with Alaska Public Media for personal

gain. No Alaska Public Media journalist may disclose information acquired by Alaska Public Media to anyone inside or outside of Alaska Public Media if the intent is to use that information for personal or institutional gain. This prohibition does not apply to accepted journalistic practices, such as sharing information as a member of a news “pool.”

4. As a general rule, Alaska Public Media journalists pay their own way in newsgathering, except in unusual circumstances (like military assignments). The Director of News must approve any exceptions. Alaska Public Media journalists may accept free passes to movie screenings, performances or similar activities that are attended for the purpose of doing reviews or stories for the air.

VII. Ethical conduct in coverage of news

1. Plagiarism is an unforgivable offense. Alaska Public Media journalists do not take other peoples’ work and present it as our own.

2. Alaska Public Media News puts its highest value on firsthand news gathering and confirmation of facts, as opposed to relying on material from other sources (AP, other newspapers and networks, etc.).

3. Alaska Public Media journalists must take special care in the use they make of information from wire service stories, reports by other broadcast news organizations, newspaper clips, articles in other publications, or on the Internet. No material from another source should ever be included verbatim, or substantially so, without attribution.

Wire services: There is one category of quotation from wire services where it is acceptable to use quotes without attribution. That is where an AP or Reuters story is about some public event like a press conference, speech by a public official in a public setting, an official statement of a government agency, a legislative hearing, and the like. In those cases, we reasonably expect that AP and Reuters are reliable conveyors of those quotes in the same way we regard the transcript services we use for these events. However, reporters and editors must use caution and check source material if there is reason to believe that a quote has been inaccurately reported or has been taken out of its proper context.

When using material from newspaper stories, Alaska Public Media journalists must double-check “facts” and other material gleaned from those stories. Too often, incorrect information is passed down from one news story to another because of the failure of one news organization to get it right. Alaska Public Media should never pass on errors in this way.

4. Alaska Public Media journalists are generous in giving credit to other news organizations for stories that demonstrate enterprise or contain exclusive information. If there is any doubt about whether to credit another news organization, ask the Director of News.

5. Alaska Public Media 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. Alaska Public Media 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.

6. There are also legal considerations when dealing with minors, anyone under the age of 18. If you interview a minor, you must obtain written or recorded permission from the minor's parent or legal guardian before using the interview. In fact, you cannot identify the minor in any way (by name, description, location, etc.) without permission. If a parent is present during reporting, verbal permission is sufficient, especially if recorded. Only if the minor is not individually identifiable – for example, the sound of a gaggle of children on a playground – do you not need to get permission. If there are other more routine instances in which a reporter wishes to use a story from a minor who is identified when permission has not been obtained, the reporter should consult the Director of News to determine whether that might be permissible.

7. Alaska Public Media 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.

8. Alaska Public Media 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 tape or material from an earlier story, we clearly identify it as such. We tell listeners about the circumstances of an interview if that information is pertinent (such as the time the interview took place, the fact that an interviewee was speaking to us while on the fly, etc.). Whenever it's not clear how an interview was obtained, we should make it clear. The audience deserves more information, not less. The burden is on the Alaska Public Media journalist to ensure that our use of such material is true to the meaning the interviewee or speaker intended.

9. Journalism should be conducted in the open. Alaska Public Media journalists disclose who they are and don't pose as law enforcement officials, investigators or other such officials.

10. Alaska Public Media 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, approval must be obtained from the Director of News before any taping or photographing takes place. Alaska Public Media journalists do not record phone calls for broadcast without permission.

11. If there is a question of legality in pursuit of a story, Alaska Public Media journalists should consult the Director of News. If you have any question about the legality of your conduct, contact the Director of News, who will contact the General Manager, who will contact a lawyer.

12. Alaska Public Media journalists do not pay for information from sources or newsmakers. They do not allow sources or interviewees to dictate how a topic will be covered, or which other voices or ideas will be included. They do not agree to submit questions in advance unless a specific instance is approved by the Director of News.

13. Alaska Public Media journalists respect embargoes on news unless the circumstances surrounding the embargo make adherence to it inappropriate, such as where the information has already surfaced elsewhere or a strong public interest requires the disclosure to place other news in the proper context.

14. Although Alaska Public Media journalists do agree to talk to sources on background when necessary, Alaska Public Media's strong preference is to have people on the record. Before any information is accepted without full attribution, reporters should make every reasonable effort to get it on the record. If that is not possible, reporters should consider seeking the information elsewhere or finding a second source.

15. When reporters quote anonymous sources, the Director of News has an obligation to be satisfied that the source is credible and reliable, and there is a journalistically justifiable reason to let that person speak without attribution. This obligation also pertains to situations where individuals ask that their real names be withheld. The Director of News has a twofold responsibility: (1) to make a judgment about whether it is editorially justified to let the person speak anonymously or under cover of a pseudonym or partial description, and (2) to be satisfied that this person is who the piece says s/he is. The Director of News should never be in the position of having to verify these things after a story has aired and a question is raised about it. If a pseudonym is used, the reporter must disclose this in the story.

16. When Alaska Public Media journalists attribute information in a story to a "source" or "sources," it is assumed that these are the Alaska Public Media journalists' sources and that they have obtained the information firsthand. If this is not the case, and the sources are ones quoted by other news organizations, then those sources must be attributed to those other news organizations.

17. Alaska Public Media journalists do not show scripts in advance or preview pieces to any person not affiliated with APTI. An Alaska Public Media journalist may review portions of a script or read back a quotation to assure accuracy. An Alaska Public Media journalist 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..

18. Our corrections policy is to correct substantive errors of fact in a timely way. If a reporter or host believes Alaska Public Media got something wrong or that there was a serious defect in a piece s/he has an affirmative responsibility to get that on the table for investigation and possible correction. Many times Alaska Public Media learns these things when someone outside brings an error to its attention. That is one natural way of finding out. But if Alaska Public Media journalists have reason to believe there was a significant error, they should not wait for it to be pointed out. Alaska Public Media journalists should err on the side of caution in checking corrections, clarifications or retractions with the Director of News before they broadcast if there is any possibility the material in question poses a legal liability.

19. A reporter or host should make clear when an interview has begun or has ended so there is no question about what is or isn't for broadcast, or what is on the record or not.

20. Archival video or audio that was obtained from a past story must be identified as such if it is used in a new piece. The audience should not be left to think that any archival or previously obtained content was gathered in the context of the current piece.

21. Alaska Public Media SOC policy is either to SOC out from the place where the reporter is filing or from the place where the reporter has gathered the majority of his/her recording. A generic SOC is preferable when a story is reported and prepared from the Anchorage office, even if its subject is elsewhere in the state.

22. Alaska Public Media does not name victims of sexual assaults. There will at times be exceptions such as certain instances when a victim goes public with his/her identity. The Director of News will judge these instances on a case-by-case basis.

VIII. Politics, community and outside activities

1. Alaska Public Media journalists may not run for office, endorse candidates or otherwise engage in politics. Since contributions to candidates are part of the public record, APTI journalists may not contribute to political campaigns, as doing so would create a conflict in the journalist's coverage.

2. Alaska Public Media journalists may not participate in, sign petitions, or donate money at marches and rallies that APTI covers.

3. Alaska Public Media journalists may not serve on government boards or commissions.

4. Alaska Public Media journalists may sit on community advisory boards, educational institution trustee boards, boards of religious organizations or boards of nonprofit organizations so long as Alaska Public Media does not normally cover them and they are not engaged in significant lobbying or political activity. Such activities should be disclosed to the Director of News to determine if they constitute a conflict.

5. When a spouse, family member or companion of an Alaska Public Media 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 Alaska Public Media journalist should advise the Director of News to determine whether s/he should recuse him or herself from a certain story or certain coverage.

IX. Social Media Guidelines

Alaska Public Media recognizes the growth and impact of social media in recent years. They are enjoyable means for connecting and communicating with friends, family, colleagues and other interested parties.

They also can be important and valuable tools for gathering information.

As NPR points out in guidelines (see addendum that follows) for its staff, "the line between private and public activity has been blurred by these [social media] tools."

The social media explosion has led us to reevaluate our ethics policy implemented in 2005 and to implement the following guidelines. They draw heavily from the guidelines of other news organizations such as NPR and The Washington Post.

* The Alaska Public Media news staff is trusted and respected for its authoritative and impartial reporting of news and public affairs. That trust and respect is undermined

when an Alaska Public Media staff member publicly takes a side or joins a cause or makes a political contribution or asserts a biased view about a public issue.

* Personal pages, Tweets, listservs, blogs are inappropriate places for commenting on or releasing information concerning the business or organizational practices of Alaska Public Media or APRN member stations. This would include budgets, strategy, personnel, news or other decisions, and policy. This policy also would apply to anonymous blogs or blogs written under pen names.

* While social media tools might be personal they are not private. An Alaska Public Media staff member who maintains a Facebook page or a Twitter account must realize, his or her communications are open and available to public scrutiny even when careful steps are taken to limit the access to those communications. Therefore, postings or activities should refrain from making statements or taking actions that call into question the staff member's impartiality.

* Alaska Public Media staff members should be careful to distinguish between professional and personal interests while engaging in social media. This means: if a staff member uses his or her personal sites or account to conduct Alaska Public Media business, he/she should identify himself/herself as an Alaska Public Media staff member.

* Alaska Public Media recognizes the amorphous nature of what it means to be a "fan" or "supporter" or "friend." In the strictest sense, being a fan or supporter would mean that one is indeed a fan or a supporter. But in the broadest sense, being a fan or supporter would mean that one is simply interested in knowing what the person or group is doing or, in other words, subscribing to a virtual newsletter. Given the various interpretations, an Alaska Public Media staff member should not seek to be a fan or friend with only one political party or an advocacy group. Should they become a friend or fan, Alaska Public Media staff members are expected to become a fan or friend of diverse group of politicians or advocacy groups.

* Questions, concerns, issues should be directed to your stations' news director and/or general manager.

X. Underwriting; foundation grants; advertising, marketing and promotion

1. A firewall will be maintained between Alaska Public Media journalists and funders. While staff will inevitably end up talking to experts and officials who work at foundations that fund us (and their grantees), we may not discuss coverage planning with grant-making officials.

2. The Director of News will determine if contact with a funder for purposes other than a journalistic opportunity is appropriate.

3. Alaska Public Media journalists may not read funding credits on air.

4. If Alaska Public Media reports on an organization or individual who funds us, we will disclose that relationship on air. Rare exceptions must be approved by the Director of News.

5. When authorized by the Director of News, Alaska Public Media journalists may take part or be asked to take part in promotional activities or events involving supporters of Alaska Public Media, such as our coordinated fund drives and public broadcasting audience-building initiatives.

XI. Application and enforcement of this Code

1. Application and enforcement of this Code is the responsibility in the first instance of every Alaska Public Media journalist. This responsibility extends to both him/herself and to every other Alaska Public Media journalist with whom he/she works. We should feel free to guide ourselves by offering suggestions to our peers to help them comply with their obligations under this Code.

2. Editors and producers have special responsibility for application of this Code to matters they are editing or producing. For each story that is produced, they should be satisfied that the standards of this Code have been met.

3. Alaska Public Media journalists who do not comply with the Code may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.

XII. Miscellaneous

1. We do not enter journalism contests or competitions when they are sponsored by groups that have an interest in influencing our coverage. All entries for contests or competitions in which entry fees are paid by Alaska Public Media must be approved by the Director of News.

2. Alaska Public Media journalists should not speak on behalf of Alaska Public Media, or its policies and practices, unless authorized to do so by appropriate Alaska Public Media officials.

3. Generally, Alaska Public Media journalists may not endorse products or provide blurbs for books, movies or performances using their Alaska Public Media identification. The Director of News may make exceptions to this rule, such as when the author of a book is a colleague of the blurb-writer. However, permission will be denied in other circumstances, such as when the author is a politician or someone the Alaska Public Media journalist covers. Blurbs drawn accurately and in context from material that has been on our air are permissible.

4. Alaska Public Media journalists must not turn over any notes, video, audio or working materials from their stories or provide information they have observed in the course of their journalistic activities to government officials or parties involved in or considering litigation. If such materials or information are requested pursuant to governmental, administrative or other legal process, Alaska Public Media journalists should immediately consult the Director of News and the General Manager.

5. Alaska Public Media owns material that has been collected or produced by Alaska Public Media journalists in the course of their duties, irrespective of whether it has been distributed on our air outright, and it may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of Alaska Public Media.

6. The provisions of this code are subject to the employment and other policies made generally applicable to all Alaska Public Media employees.

Addendum:

NPR News Social Media Guidelines

Posted October 15, 2009

Social networking sites, such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter have become an integral part of everyday life for millions of people around the world. As NPR 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 now. Information from your Facebook page, your blog entries, and your tweets - even if you intend them to be personal messages to your friends or family - can be easily circulated beyond your intended audience. This content, therefore, represents you and NPR to the outside world as much as a radio story or story for NPR.org does. As in all of your reporting, the [NPR Code of Ethics](#) should guide you in your use of social media. You should read and be sure you understand the Code.

What follows are some basic but important guidelines to help you as you deal with the changing world of gathering and reporting news, and to provide additional guidance on specific issues. These guidelines apply to every member of the News Division.

First and foremost - you should do nothing that could undermine your credibility with the public, damage NPR's standing as an impartial source of news, or otherwise jeopardize NPR's reputation.

Recognize that everything you write or receive on a social media site is public. Anyone with access to the web can get access to your activity on social media sites. And 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.

You should conduct yourself in social media forums with an eye to how your behavior or comments might appear if we 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.

While we strongly encourage linking to NPR.org, you may not repost NPR copyrighted material to social networks without prior permission. For example, it is o.k. to link from your blog or Facebook profile to a story of yours on the NPR site, but you should not copy the full text or audio onto a personal site or Web page. You may accomplish this through the NPR API or widgets that NPR provides to the public under the same terms of use as apply to anyone else.

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.

Journalism should be conducted in the open, regardless of the platform. Just as you would do if you were working offline, you should identify yourself as an NPR journalist when you are working online. If you are acting as an NPR journalist, you must not use a pseudonym or misrepresent who you are. If you are acting in a personal capacity, you may use a screen name if that is allowed by the relevant forum.

You should 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.

Content gathered online is subject to the same attribution rules as other content.

You must not advocate for political or other polarizing issues online. This extends to joining online groups or using social media in any form (including your Facebook page or a personal blog) to express personal views on a political or other controversial issue that you could not write for the air or post on NPR.org.

Your simple participation in some online groups could be seen to indicate that you endorse their views. Consider whether you can accomplish your purposes by just observing a group's activity, rather than becoming a member. If you do join, be clear that you've done so to seek information or story ideas. And if you "friend" or join a group representing one side of an issue, do so for a group representing the competing viewpoint, when reasonable to do so.

Realize that social media communities have their own culture, etiquette, and norms, and be respectful of them.

If you are writing about meetings and gatherings at NPR - always ask first if the forum is on or off the record before distributing information or content about it.

And a final caution - when in doubt, consult with your editor.