

PBS EDITORIAL STANDARDS AND PRACTICES

The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) Editorial Standards and Practices articulate the core principles that ensure the quality and integrity of all content distributed by PBS. These standards are the cornerstone of PBS's commitment to serving the public interest and preserving the public's trust.

Everyone who creates, evaluates, or oversees content for PBS is responsible for familiarizing themselves with and adhering to these standards, as well as related PBS policies on content funding and production.¹ These standards, which are periodically reviewed and revised by PBS, are not intended to address every question that may arise when creating or evaluating content; rather, they are meant to provide a critical resource for encouraging and facilitating discussion about whether content is suitable for distribution by PBS.

When in doubt about how best to interpret and apply these standards, please reach out to PBS Programming, Digital, or Standards & Practices staff.

I. MISSION

PBS is a non-profit membership organization that, in collaboration with its member stations across the country, serves the public interest through content that informs, educates, inspires, and entertains. Content distributed by PBS should reflect the highest standards of quality, demonstrate a rigorous commitment to editorial integrity unencumbered by commercial imperatives, and further society's fundamental interest in informed civil discourse.

The hallmark of PBS content is editorial integrity. PBS, member stations, and producers must always endeavor to shield the editorial process from political pressure or improper influence from content funders in order to maintain the highest level of trust.

PBS treats the public as citizens rather than consumers. PBS content is distinguished by its quality, professionalism, and commitment to lifelong learning. PBS content includes programming that gives children the tools to succeed; documentaries that responsibly explore challenging subjects; news that keeps citizens informed on world events; and programs that expose the audience to a wide range of music, theater, dance, and art.

PBS strives to offer content that expresses diverse perspectives and furthers the goals of a democratic society. PBS does this by giving the public access to content on a range of issues so that they can participate in civic dialogue and make informed judgments about the significant issues of the day. In doing so, PBS aims to reflect the pluralism of society and address the needs of unserved and underserved audiences.

Finally, PBS is committed to experimentation and innovation. Due to its noncommercial nature, PBS is free from the constraints that compel commercial media to prioritize achieving the largest audience. This absence of commercial pressure gives PBS the freedom to take risks, seeking out content that is

¹ The [PBS Funding Standards & Practices](#) and the [PBS Co-Production Guidelines](#) address the topics of funding and production in more detail.

unique in format, technique, and substance, and that courageously explores subjects with honesty and candor.

Through these commitments, and the editorial principles articulated below, PBS strives to meet the core goals set forth in the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967: (i) serving as a source of alternative content “for all citizens of the Nation”; (ii) encouraging the development of programming “that involves creative risks and that addresses the needs of unserved and underserved audiences”; and (iii) developing content that adheres to “objectivity and balance in all programs or series of programs of a controversial nature.”

II. STAKEHOLDER ROLES

Producers, PBS, member stations, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) each play essential and distinct roles in the development and distribution of PBS content.

A. Producers

PBS content is produced by a diverse group of member station producers from across the country, independent producers such as individual filmmakers and major studios, foreign broadcast organizations, other media organizations, and—to the limited extent that it produces content—PBS itself. In selecting content for distribution, PBS must rely heavily on the honesty, integrity, talent, skill, judgment, and good faith of producers. While producers will, where applicable, adhere to their own editorial policies, they must also carefully adhere to these standards. Producers are responsible for ensuring that all employees, freelance staff, and other contractors that they work with abide by these standards.

Some issues may raise difficult questions that require especially close collaboration with PBS during production. When such questions or issues arise, producers should consult promptly with PBS Programming, Digital, or Standards & Practices staff, who can provide guidance on how best to work within these standards. Producers should consult with PBS as early as possible in the production process so that any problems can be more easily resolved. Through its active engagement early in production, PBS can help ensure that these standards are interpreted and applied fairly and consistently to all producers. In the event that questions or problems become evident after content has been distributed and shared with the audience, producers must work closely with PBS to promptly and prominently address any errors.

B. PBS

PBS is responsible for ensuring that everyone who creates, evaluates, or oversees content for PBS adheres to these standards. While content is most often produced by people who are not PBS employees, PBS staff is actively involved in fostering the production of quality content that is responsive to the needs of member stations and the audience.

PBS engages in an ongoing, iterative review of content throughout its development, and PBS always makes the final determination on whether content meets these standards and is appropriate for distribution. In some cases, PBS may determine that content provisionally accepted and planned for distribution ultimately falls short of these standards. In those instances, PBS reserves the right to require further changes to the content to ensure its editorial integrity. While PBS is committed to closely

collaborating with producers during this process, PBS ultimately may decide not to distribute the content if producers are unwilling or unable to make required changes to the content or the underlying production process.

The acceptance of content by PBS is signified by PBS's distribution of the content and the placement of the PBS logo on the content. Use of the PBS logo conveys important source-identifying information to viewers and makes PBS accountable for the quality and integrity of the content. Member stations and other distributors may not remove the PBS logo from a program distributed by PBS without PBS's consent. Likewise, member stations and other distributors may not add the PBS logo to a program that was not accepted and approved for distribution by PBS.

C. Member Stations

Public broadcasting's greatest potential is realized when it serves the unique needs of local communities. No one is better qualified to determine and respond to those local needs than the public television stations licensed to their communities. While PBS strives to provide a broad range of content to its member stations, whether and how to locally distribute this content is at each station's individual discretion. Moreover, in addition to using PBS content, member stations frequently produce their own content or acquire content—sometimes including content that was not accepted by PBS—from distributors other than PBS.

As a licensee of the Federal Communications Commission, each public television station bears a non-delegable duty to ensure that its broadcast program services fulfill its statutory obligations as a broadcaster. While other entities, including PBS, may assist local stations in fulfilling those obligations, ultimate responsibility rests with each station for: (i) serving the needs of its community with an appropriate balance of subjects and viewpoints across its broadcast schedule; (ii) ensuring the quality and integrity of its overall content distribution services; and (iii) complying with applicable laws and regulations.

D. CPB

CPB is a private, non-profit corporation created by the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 to distribute federally appropriated funds to public broadcasting organizations nationwide. Each year, CPB distributes these funds to local public broadcasting stations, PBS, and other public media distributors and producers. CPB is authorized by statute to “facilitate the full development of public telecommunications in which programs of high quality, diversity, creativity, excellence, and innovation, which are obtained from diverse sources, will be made available to public telecommunications entities.”

To shield public television producers and distributors from political influence, CPB is prohibited by statute from owning or operating public television stations and from producing or distributing public television programs. CPB is also tasked with conducting its mission “in ways that will most effectively assure the maximum freedom of [public television] from interference with, or control of, program content or other activities.”

III. EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

The following Editorial Principles are the cornerstone of editorial integrity that foster trust in PBS content. These principles—all of which are of equal importance—govern the work of producers and PBS staff, who must apply them in good faith and using their best judgment. Through these principles, PBS delivers on its mission and the promise of “objectivity and balance” set forth in the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967.

These Editorial Principles apply to content distributed by PBS on all platforms, including social media and other emerging technologies, which are addressed more fully in Section IV.B below. Given that platforms differ in terms of format, tone, voice, and audience expectations, the interpretation and application of these core principles will necessarily consider those factors.

Similarly, judgments about how best to interpret and implement these principles may differ depending on the content’s subject, the particular program, and the intended audience. For instance, documentaries that focus specifically on opinion or commentary regarding a particular subject do not necessarily need to express all possible viewpoints. Such a documentary should, however, rigorously uphold the principle of transparency by making it clear to the audience why a particular opinion was explored and why particular sources were chosen. As another example, the principle of accuracy may be applied in a different manner to historical drama than to news and public affairs reporting. PBS recognizes that it is impossible to anticipate every circumstance that may arise in the production of content, and ensuring the editorial integrity of content depends on the professionalism and thoughtfulness of producers and PBS staff.

➤ **Editorial Independence**

Editorial independence is essential to serving the public interest and preserving the public’s trust. Content distributed by PBS must be free of undue influence from third-party funders, political interests, and other outside forces. PBS must remain unwavering in its commitment to distributing content that exemplifies ethical and journalistic integrity rather than advancing commercial interests. This obligation is achieved through the good-faith professional judgment of producers and PBS staff and by carefully listening to the public. Editorial independence gives producers the intellectual freedom to achieve the other principles below.

➤ **Accuracy**

Accuracy means honesty, fidelity to facts, and humility on the part of producers and PBS staff to question their own assumptions about the subjects they are handling. Accuracy includes more than simply verifying whether information is correct; facts must be placed in sufficient context based on the nature of the piece to ensure that the public is not misled. For example, facts can lack necessary context if they are presented in a way that omits important details, quotes someone without correctly reflecting what the person was asked, or distorts what occurred. Producers must also be mindful of the language used to frame the facts to avoid deceiving or misleading the audience or encouraging false inferences. A commitment to accuracy also requires gathering, updating, and promptly correcting information as a story develops. Producers must exercise the highest level of care in verifying information, especially when it relates to any accusations of wrongdoing.

➤ **Fairness**

Producers must consider all relevant facts and perspectives on a particular subject and present information in a respectful and responsible manner—without favoritism or discrimination. Fairness does not require that equal time be given to conflicting opinions or viewpoints. Fairness does, however, require producers to be open-minded when evaluating the merits and assessing the credibility of all opinions or viewpoints while also managing their own personal opinions and biases. One purpose of fairness is for audiences to appreciate and learn from content, even if they disagree with its conclusions. Fairness also requires that producers carefully represent the words and actions of individuals they interview or otherwise cover. Producers must never manipulate the views of those they cover in an effort to cast them in stereotypical roles or to support predetermined perspectives. Instead, producers must be mindful of the culture, history, and social customs of those they cover when presenting their views. Producers must give those they cover the opportunity to present their strongest case, while always providing appropriate context to the audience, and producers must give those who are the subject of attack or criticism a reasonable opportunity to respond.

➤ **Transparency**

Transparency is the principle that content should be produced in a way that allows the audience to evaluate the credibility of the work and determine for themselves whether it is trustworthy. Producers must be open with the audience—to the extent practical—about how the work was done. Being transparent is the proof, in effect, that the editorial principles outlined in these standards are living principles that inform a professional and ethical editorial process—not simply words on a page. While specific methods may vary by circumstance and platform, transparency means respecting that the audience is entitled to understand significant underlying editorial decisions. If producers arrive at a certain conclusion or a point of view, the audience should be able to evaluate how that conclusion or view was reached. Producers who face difficult editorial decisions should consider explaining why certain choices were made; if relevant questions cannot be answered, producers should endeavor to explain why. Sources must be clearly identified, and, in those rare instances when confidential sources need to be used, producers must explain the decision to allow anonymity. Transparency also means using labels or other disclosures when presenting information that might be unclear or confusing to the audience. Finally, transparency requires that producers disclose to the audience all sources of funding for the production and distribution of content.

➤ **Inclusiveness**

PBS strives to contribute to informed debate by presenting, over time, content that addresses a broad range of ideas, information, and perspectives. Inclusiveness means that content should reflect views from different backgrounds, such as geographic areas, ethnicities, genders, age groups, religious beliefs, political viewpoints, and income levels. Where appropriate, PBS may condition acceptance of content on the producer's willingness to further the goal of inclusivity by including viewpoints from which the public might draw a range of different conclusions. For instance, PBS may request that supplemental material be added, such as a new segment, an additional episode in a series of programs, or links to credible, high-quality, related resources that provide access to additional information with diverse viewpoints.

➤ **Accountability**

Producers and PBS staff must remain accountable and responsive to the audience, PBS's public editor, and PBS member stations. Accountability requires producers to stand by their work and to be prepared and willing to respond to relevant inquiries about it, including through active and thoughtful digital engagement with the audience. Accountability also means that producers must adhere to the highest professional standards of conduct and diligently pursue and report the truth. Conflicts of interest must be avoided, and any real or perceived conflicts that could have the appearance of influencing content must be disclosed to PBS. Producers must correct errors, in close consultation with PBS, as soon as they determine that errors occurred. Producers must also work closely with PBS to respond in a timely manner, and to the best of their abilities, to questions or criticisms from the public about significant editorial decisions or ethical issues related to content.

IV. APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES

This section provides guidance on how best to put the Editorial Principles into practice. This guidance is supplemented online with specific case studies and commentary from experienced PBS producers. PBS may require changes to the content, changes to the production process, the addition of supplemental materials, prominent disclosures to the audiences, or decline to distribute content that, in its judgment, violates these best practices or other practices that are not consistent with the highest professional standards of editorial integrity.

The Application of Principles is expected to evolve over time because the media landscape is rapidly changing. Unlike the Editorial Principles themselves, which are intended to serve as the bedrock on which PBS content is created no matter the platform, the interpretation and application of these principles may evolve as new modes of distribution and of engaging with the audience are developed. While the Editorial Principles are designed to be platform neutral, the application of these principles will be adapted to account for audience expectations and the unique constraints and opportunities of various distribution platforms.

A. Application to All PBS Content

While it is not possible to address all issues that will arise in applying the Editorial Principles, the most common best practices for implementing these principles for all types of content distributed by PBS include the following:

1. Implement Fact-Checking Procedures

Producers must implement rigorous fact-checking procedures to verify the accuracy of all factual assertions. As part of these procedures, producers should be able to identify the source for each asserted fact and why that source is reliable. As a general rule, at least two authoritative, independent sources should be on the record before controversial assertions are included in content for distribution by PBS. The accuracy of assertions by expert and non-expert interviewees should never be assumed, particularly if such assertions are contentious or otherwise questionable. Producers should also pay careful attention to the accuracy of names and titles, dates, places, statistics, and foreign language translations. *[Accuracy]*

2. Correct Errors Promptly and Clearly

Producers are responsible for correcting errors in a timely manner that is abundantly clear to the audience. Producers must immediately bring to PBS's attention the discovery of any significant errors, and producers should regularly inform PBS of all other errors so that PBS can monitor trends and ensure accountability. Producers must also be responsive to the public when errors are brought to their attention, and in doing so, producers must closely cooperate with PBS in communicating any necessary corrections to the public. *[Accuracy & Accountability]*

3. Permit Anonymity Sparingly

Anonymous sources should be used when granting anonymity is the only practical way to obtain important information. Producers must explain to the audience why they are withholding the identity of the source and why the source is credible. When using information from a source who must remain anonymous, producers should—to the extent practical—describe (without revealing the source's identity) how the source knows the information, the source's motivations (if any), why anonymity was required, and any other details that will help the audience evaluate the source's credibility. Anonymous sources generally should not be used to provide opinion, speculation, or hearsay. They are best used when they offer information that then can be subsequently verified with on-the-record sources. Producers are expected to treat each determination to grant anonymity as a significant executive-level decision, and producers may be asked to review such determinations with PBS. *[Accountability]*

4. Identify Real or Perceived Conflicts of Interest

Producers must not accept gifts, favors, or compensation from individuals and businesses that they cover (other than tokens of nominal value). Such gifts, favors, or compensation could have the appearance of influencing content, regardless of the intent, and should be politely refused. Producers must inform PBS about any real or perceived conflicts of interest throughout the production process. This includes any financial or personal interests, or the activities of family members, companions, or close relatives that could reasonably be perceived as having the potential to influence the producer's work. Producers also should avoid engaging in political activities or public expressions that could reasonably be perceived as undermining their ability to produce impartial content. For example, while producers may wish to publicly share certain views, producers must ensure that those views do not create a real or perceived conflict of interest with projects that they are actively developing for PBS. In some cases, a real or perceived conflict of interest can be addressed by prominently disclosing it to the audience. In other instances, a real or perceived conflict of interest may require certain changes to the content, necessitate changes to the production process, or prevent PBS from accepting the producer's content for distribution. *[Editorial Independence & Accountability]*

5. Include a Diversity of Voices Both In Front of and Behind the Camera

Producers should incorporate diverse perspectives as a way of making content more inclusive, accurate, and complete. To ensure that content reflects a broad range of viewpoints, producers must strive to hire, and retain, a diverse production staff. PBS believes that a diverse staff helps guard against the perpetuation of cultural stereotypes and leads to content that better serves the public as a whole. To further this objective, and to inform PBS's decision-making, producers may be required to provide information regarding the diversity of their staff and the inclusiveness of their production practices. *[Inclusiveness]*

6. Do Not Generally Pre-Screen Content for Interested Parties

Work in progress (including rough cuts, fine cuts, and segments) generally should not be pre-screened for funders, interviewees, or outside parties that may exert undue influence. The editorial process must remain free from any attempt to influence or interfere with the professional editorial judgments of producers and PBS. The executive producer, in consultation with PBS, may pre-screen content in limited circumstances to, for example, ensure the accuracy of sensitive information or to comply with national security concerns. The pre-screening of content for media critics or for other publicity purposes is a common and generally acceptable practice subject to appropriate embargoes and provided that no undue influence occurs. *[Editorial Independence]*

7. Attribute Non-Original Materials

Audiences should be able to clearly understand the source of information. As digital technology makes it easier to share and redistribute content, producers must exercise care to never re-use someone else's work and pass it off as their own. While not all materials incorporated within content distributed by PBS must always be labeled (e.g., stock footage, home movies, still images), producers should provide attribution at any point when doing so would help the audience better understand the material. *[Transparency]*

8. Publish Documentation of Sources

Producers should make publicly available materials that document their sources whenever feasible. If content is later challenged or called into question, producers must be prepared to make responsive information available to PBS (e.g., annotated scripts). *[Accountability]*

9. Verify User-Generated Content

User-generated content consists of various materials created by members of the public, including videos and images, eyewitness accounts of events, and social media comments. Use of such content can be valuable, but producers need to act judiciously and proceed with caution before deciding to use material that they cannot independently verify. Producers should not assume that such content is accurate or authentic, and they should take reasonable steps to contextualize the content and to confirm its veracity. If producers decide that using such content will inform and educate the audience, producers must take care to describe where it came from, to what extent and how it was verified, and why they decided to include it. Whenever possible and appropriate, producers should seek permission from the originator of user-generated content for its use. *[Accuracy]*

10. Consider How Editorial Partnerships Impact PBS's Credibility

PBS and its producers may from time to time enter into editorial partnerships with other media organizations, educational or cultural institutions, freelance journalists, or other parties. While these collaborations are generally encouraged, producers and PBS staff should be mindful of the potential impact on PBS's credibility, and they must ensure that all editorial partners adhere to these standards. Furthermore, all editorial partnerships must adhere to the [PBS Co-Production Guidelines](#). The principle of transparency also requires that any such partnerships be clearly disclosed to the audience. *[Editorial Independence & Transparency]*

11. Use Labels and Other Disclosures to Aid Audience's Understanding

Producers must use labels and other visual or verbal disclosures to present information that allows the audience to better understand, and make informed judgments about, content. Disclosures are also required to put the audience on notice about graphic images or language that they might wish to avoid. Producers and PBS staff should use their discretion in determining how best to implement these disclosures while being mindful that they must be clear and concise to ensure that the audience can easily absorb the information. *[Transparency]*

12. Clearly Identify Opinion and Commentary

Producers must identify for the audience in a clear and consistent manner material that is opinion or commentary, and communicate to the audience whose views are being presented. PBS considers opinion or commentary to be content that reflects a particular point of view or observations on a topic without presenting relevant contrasting facts and perspectives. To be fully transparent, it is important to include such identifications at both the beginning and end of content. Opinion or commentary can be given great latitude with respect to personal and artistic expression so long as it is not inaccurate or defamatory. However, such content must never manipulate selected facts in order to propagandize. *[Transparency]*

13. Be Cautious With Pre-Trial Coverage

The United States legal system presumes that defendants are innocent until proven guilty in criminal proceedings. While reporting on both civil and criminal proceedings is often in the public interest, the principle of fairness requires that producers must be sensitive to the potential effects of pre-trial coverage on those accused of wrongdoing. Producers should view with skepticism any self-serving statements from attorneys representing a party to the proceeding. Producers should also be cautious about using any alleged evidence that is made available to the public before trial. *[Fairness]*

14. Avoid Gratuitously Offensive or Objectionable Material

While controversial and sensitive material may need to be included in PBS content, material that is gratuitously offensive (e.g., extreme violence, racial epithets, sexism, graphic language, or nudity) should not be included unless it is essential to understanding the matter at hand and does not violate federal law against broadcasting indecent and profane content. Material that is included merely to shock or draw attention and that does not impart valuable information is gratuitous.

Given that questions of taste cannot be answered in the abstract, specific issues should be resolved in consultation with PBS Programming, Digital, and Standards & Practices staff in light of contemporary standards of taste, the law, and the newsworthiness of the material. If PBS concludes that the exclusion of such material would distort an important reality or impair the content's artistic quality, PBS may condition distribution of the content on providing audiences and member stations with sufficiently clear advance notice. *[Accountability]*

B. Application to Social Media and Emerging Technologies

PBS encourages its staff and producers to engage with the audience on social media platforms while also using reasonable discretion and carefully considering whether their interactions have the potential to

compromise PBS's nonpartisan reputation and the public's trust. To that end, all PBS staff must adhere to the guidelines in PBS's [Social Media Policy](#) and [Political Policy](#). Producers and staff who are communicating with the public on behalf of PBS by using official social media channels or specific program channels have a heightened responsibility to ensure that they consistently adhere to the Editorial Principles. Examples of important best practices for implementing these principles include:

1. Exercise Civility

Social media can be a useful platform for conversation and debate about content. PBS encourages robust digital engagement with the audience to solicit and encourage diverse views and perspectives, particularly when the content at issue involves opinion or commentary. When engaging with the public on social media, however, producers and PBS staff need to avoid getting drawn into personal attacks or other angry exchanges. They should instead strive to facilitate a civil exchange of ideas and learning. *[Accountability]*

2. Treat Errors Just as Seriously as on Other Platforms

Despite the informal and fast-paced nature of social media, producers and PBS staff should strive to avoid distributing factual errors or misleading information. Mistakes should be treated as seriously as when they occur on other distribution platforms. In the event of an error, it is PBS practice to promptly put out a new social media post with the correct information and to clearly explain what was wrong with the prior post. In the interest of transparency, the audience also should be able to view the edit history of the post whenever possible, depending on the capabilities of the social media platform where the post occurred. It is generally not appropriate to simply delete the erroneous content without maintaining a public record in some manner, such as a screenshot or other acknowledgment. *[Accuracy & Transparency]*

3. Prevent Conflicts of Interest

While producers and their editorial staff may wish to publicly share certain beliefs or opinions on social media, producers must ensure that those views do not create real or perceived conflicts of interest with projects that they are actively developing for PBS. Producers must avoid engaging in public expression that could reasonably be perceived as undermining their ability to produce impartial content. Producers also must be cognizant that when they or their staff hold themselves out as affiliated with PBS, any beliefs or opinions shared on social media will inevitably reflect back on PBS. For this reason, producers should evaluate the social media accounts of their editorial staff to ensure that the independence and credibility of the content and the reputation of PBS is maintained. *[Editorial Independence]*

4. Provide Adequate Context

When posting information, particularly information that is sensitive or controversial, producers and PBS staff should pause to consider whether particular social networks allow for proper context. For example, multiple tweets might be needed to accurately and fairly convey information or to adequately answer questions about complex subjects. *[Accuracy & Fairness]*

5. Avoid Sensationalizing to Generate Clicks

While producers and PBS staff are encouraged to write clever and engaging social media posts, they must avoid sensationalizing content or providing misleading headlines in an effort to artificially generate interest. *[Accuracy & Fairness]*

6. Vet Third-Party Content

When sharing information from third parties, producers and PBS staff should be transparent about where the information came from and judicious about what information is appropriate to share. Every effort must be made to prevent the transmission of false information. News generally should only be reported from legitimate, bona fide sources (e.g., other news organizations such as the Associated Press) after exercising due diligence to verify that the information originated from an authentic account. Care also should be taken to ensure that the sharing of opinions and commentary is not viewed as an endorsement by PBS. When using a video or photograph from a third party, producers and PBS staff should strive to ensure that it has not been manipulated—for example, by checking the metadata. If third-party content contains graphic or sensitive material, it may be appropriate to add a clear upfront disclosure or to simply not link to such content. *[Accuracy & Transparency]*

C. Application to Children’s Content

PBS believes that children are a special audience with fewer critical reasoning skills and greater vulnerability. As such, PBS seeks to provide young viewers with engaging and age-appropriate content that covers social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and language development and that focuses on major curriculum areas, including literacy, math, science, engineering, technology, arts, geography, and history. Important best practices for applying the Editorial Principles, detailed more fully in the PBS Producer Guidelines for Children’s Content, are as follows:

1. Incorporate Age-Appropriate Goals

All children’s content must have explicit age-appropriate educational goals that are clearly incorporated into the storylines and character development, as well as in digital and community engagement materials. Dangerous, illegal, or otherwise anti-social behaviors that could affect a child’s sense of well-being, or that could be easily mimicked by a child, should be avoided—for instance, name-calling; bullying; rudeness and sarcasm; gratuitous physical and psychological violence; the use of hazardous household items such as razors, knives, or matches; and the use of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco. *[Accountability]*

2. Engage Education Advisors

The production teams for children’s content must include early childhood education advisors or consultants to ensure that the content is properly designed to meet its educational goals. Producers also should make use of child development and early learning research and best practices to ensure that the educational goals are age-appropriate. *[Accuracy]*

3. Represent Children of All Backgrounds

PBS strives to distribute content that represents all children. The principle of inclusiveness requires

producers to be sensitive and thoughtful when stories involve race, color, ethnicity, religion, gender, mental and physical disabilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, or socioeconomic class. Racial or gender epithets, insulting or demeaning stereotypes, and dialogue that otherwise discredits an individual or group are not permitted. *[Inclusiveness]*

D. Application to Production Practices

Producers should strive to be leaders in experimenting with innovative techniques for presentation, story-telling, information delivery, and engagement with the public. However, producers should not make choices that could deceive the audience, such as inventing or adding misleading elements that were not originally present. Examples of other important best practices for applying the Editorial Principles include:

1. Edit for Brevity and Clarity, Not to Distort

All producers face the necessity of selection—which material to leave in and which material to edit out. Reducing and organizing information is a fundamental part of the producer’s craft. The objective of the editing process is to collect and order information in a manner that fairly and accurately portrays reality. Producers must ensure that edited material remains faithful in tone and substance to that reality; they should not sensationalize events or create a misleading version of what actually occurred. For instance, when editing an interview for brevity or sequencing, producers must ensure that such edits do not change the meaning or context of the interviewee’s responses. *[Accuracy]*

2. Do Not Stage Events

Producers should not stage events that did not occur or suggest that others stage events that did not occur for the sake of media coverage with the intent to mislead or deceive the audience. *[Accuracy]*

3. Do Not Deceive the Audience

The credibility of content is jeopardized whenever the audience or a source is deceived or might feel deceived. Deceiving the audience includes conflating time so that it appears that several interviews were actually one or presenting taped material in a manner perceived as live. So as not to deceive a source, interviewers generally should be clear about the purpose of the interview. *[Fairness & Transparency]*

4. Use Caution When Implementing Dramatization Techniques

The use of music and sound effects, dramatic lighting or staging, or other artificial effects can subtly influence the impression left with the audience. Producers must exercise care not to use such techniques in a way that is unfairly manipulative by distorting the reality of what occurred, including giving the impression that such music was in the scene itself when it was not. *[Fairness]*

5. Identify Re-Creations and Simulations

In instances where re-creations or simulations of actual events that did occur are necessary or desirable to inform the audience, they should be as accurate as possible and clearly identified (either through the use of verbal or visual disclosures or through stylization techniques such as the use of different colors or

camera speeds) whenever there is a possibility that members of the audience could reasonably be confused or misled. *[Transparency]*

6. Technique Must Not Overwhelm Substance

Advances in production technology carry with them the possibility that technique may overwhelm substance—overshadowing or distorting the underlying content, making the content technically inaccessible, or distracting the public’s attention from the information that the content is attempting to communicate to the audience. PBS will reject content that, in its judgment, disserves the viewer or its subject matter by inappropriately pursuing technique at the expense of substance. *[Fairness]*

7. Avoid Influencing the Course of Events

Images and video are extraordinarily powerful tools; the mere presence of cameras can change or influence events. Producers should endeavor to minimize and, to the extent possible, eliminate this interference. In crowds, demonstrations, and riots, as well as in other similar circumstances, camera crews and production teams should seek to be as inconspicuous as possible, particularly when their presence might incite an extreme reaction or unduly influence the course of events. *[Accountability]*

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These standards are fundamental to upholding the ethical and journalistic integrity of all content distributed by PBS. While these standards are an essential resource for PBS staff and producers, they cannot anticipate every issue that may arise when creating or evaluating content. When a question is not adequately addressed by these standards, PBS, in close collaboration with producers, will strive to reach a decision that best honors the principles of Editorial Independence, Accuracy, Fairness, Transparency, Inclusiveness, and Accountability. To help keep pace with changes in editorial practices, these standards are supported by additional resources and information available on the [Station Management Center](#).

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