

# **The Reporters Inc.**

## **Ethics Policy**

***(This policy of guidelines includes elements of both the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics (SPJ) and ProPublica's (PP) Code of Ethics. Each item credited appropriately.)***

Journalists working with The Reporters Inc. should:

- \*Be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information. (SPJ)
- \*Tell the truth at all times. (PP)
- \*Check the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible. (SPJ)
- \*Diligently seek out subjects of stories to give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing. (SPJ)
- \*Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability. (SPJ)
- \*Always question sources' motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises. (SPJ)
- \*Never say that a person declined comment when he or she is already quoted anonymously. (PP)
- \*Understand that editors have an obligation to know the identity of unnamed sources in our stories, so that editors and reporters can jointly assess the appropriateness of using their information. Sources need to also understand this practice. (PP)
- \*Describe how documents were obtained, if a story hinges on documents as opposed to interviews. (PP)

\*Make certain that headlines, promotional materials, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context. (SPJ)

\*Although image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible, never distort the content of news photos or video. If re-enactments are necessary to tell a story, label them. (SPJ)

\*Until all other methods of obtaining information are exhausted, avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story. (SPJ)

\*Never plagiarize. (PP and SPJ).

\*Never pay for interviews. (PP)

\*Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so. (SPJ)

\*Examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others. (SPJ)

\*Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status. (SPJ)

\*Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant. (SPJ)

\*Refrain from partisan political activity, including signing petitions, participating in marches or rallies, displaying lawn signs or making political contributions. Other political activities (including "issue oriented" activity) are permitted. (PP)

\*Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid. (SPJ)

\*Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and

inexperienced sources or subjects. (SPJ)

\*Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief. (SPJ)

\*Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance. (SPJ)

\*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 can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy. (SPJ)

\*Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes. (SPJ)

\*Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges. (SPJ)

\*Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed. (SPJ)

\*Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable. (SPJ)

\*Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct. (SPJ)

\*Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media. (SPJ)

\*Admit mistakes and correct them promptly. (SPJ)

\*Discuss with an editor, any time a question of fairness or accuracy is raised about any aspect of our work, whether by a source, subject or member of the public, and decide what response is warranted. (PP)

\*Always know that The Reporters Inc. maintains an open door policy and suggests that employees share their questions, concerns,

suggestions or complaints with someone who can address them properly. (PP)

\*Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others. (SPJ)

When in doubt, ask. (PP)