

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES OF EDITORIAL INTEGRITY IN PUBLIC BROADCASTING

The mission of public broadcasting is to bring to its audience the highest accomplishments of our society and civilization in all of its rich diversity, to permit creative talent to fulfill the potential of the electronic media to educate and inform, and to provide opportunities for the diverse groupings of the North American people to benefit from a pattern of programming unavailable from other sources.*

No one is more important to the fulfillment of public broadcasting's mission than the men and women of the boards of trustees of the licensee stations. They are custodians of their institutions' fiscal reputation, a currency necessary to acquire support from those whose taxes and donations make public broadcasting possible. They are also the final guardians of public broadcasting's editorial integrity and its reputation in the marketplace of ideas, where reputation is legal tender.

Editorial integrity in public broadcasting programming means the responsible application by professional practitioners of a free and independent decision-making process which is ultimately accountable to the needs and interests of all citizens.

In order to assure that programs meet the standards of editorial integrity the public has a right to expect, the following five principles and guidelines establish a foundation for trustee action. The principles and guidelines also form a basic standard by which the services of a public broadcasting licensee can be judged. At the same time, they form a basis for evaluating all aspects of a public broadcasting station's governance, from enabling legislation to the policy positions of the licensee board. The ultimate goal of the principles and guidelines is to assist public broadcasting trustees in fulfilling their vital role in this important public service.

1. We are Trustees of a Public Service

Public broadcasting was created to provide a wide range of programming services of the highest professionalism and quality which can educate, enlighten and entertain the public, its audience and source of support. It is a noncommercial enterprise, reflecting the worthy purpose of the federal and state governments to provide education and cultural enrichment to their citizens.*

As trustees of this public service, part of our job is to educate all citizens and public policy makers to our function, and to assure that we can certify to all citizens that station management responsibly exercises the editorial freedom necessary to achieve public broadcasting's mission effectively.

* A Public Trust: The Report of the Carnegie Commission on the Future of Public Broadcasting. Bantam: New York, 1979.

2. Our Service is Programming

The purpose of public broadcasting is to offer its audiences public and educational programming which provides alternatives in quality, type and scheduling. All activities of a public broadcasting licensee exist solely to enhance and support excellent programs. No matter how well other activities are performed, public broadcasting will be judged by its programming service and the value of that service to its audiences.

As trustees, we must create the climate, the policies and the sense of direction, which assures that the mission of providing high quality programming, remains paramount.

3. Credibility is the Currency of Our Programming

As surely as programming is our purpose, and the product by which our audiences judge our value, that judgment will depend upon their confidence that our programming is free from undue or improper influence. Our role as trustees includes educating both citizens and public policy makers to the importance of the fact and to assuring that our stations meet this challenge in a responsible and efficient way.

As trustees, we must adopt policies and procedures, which enable professional management to operate in a way which will give the public full confidence in the editorial integrity of our programming.

4. Many of Our Responsibilities are grounded in Constitutional or Statutory Law

Public broadcasting stations are subject to a variety of statutory and regulatory requirements and restrictions. These include the federal statute under which licensees must operate, as well as other applicable federal and state laws. Public broadcasting is also cloaked with the mantle of First Amendment protection of a free press and freedom of speech.

As trustees we must be sure that these responsibilities are met. To do so requires us to understand the legal and constitutional framework within which our stations operate, and to inform and educate those whose position or influence may affect the operation of our licensee.

5. We Have a Fiduciary Responsibility for Public Funds

Public broadcasting depends upon funds provided by individual and corporate contributions, and by local, state and federal taxes. Trustees must therefore develop and implement policies, which can assure the public and their chosen public officials alike that this money is well spent.

As trustees, we must assure conformance to sound fiscal and management practices. We must also assure that the legal requirements placed on us by funding sources are

met. At the same time, we must resist the inappropriate use of otherwise legitimate oversight procedures to distort the programming process, which such funding supports.