



Ethics and Standards Code

voiceofsandiego.org

2508 Historic Decatur Rd.
Suite 120
San Diego, CA 92106
(619) 325-0525

We are committed to the highest standards of journalism.

At all times, we will strive to adhere to these basic principles:

- ☞ We are accurate, fair and independent.
- ☞ We are transparent and open.
- ☞ We acknowledge our mistakes and hold ourselves accountable.

The following are guidelines to help us meet these expectations. Our audience should hold us to these tenets about our work.

We may allow exceptions to certain guidelines under extraordinary circumstances. But we will always disclose any exception we make at the appropriate time.

I. Getting Information and Dealing with Sources

- ☞ We represent ourselves honestly. We do not lie about our affiliation with VOSD and we identify ourselves as VOSD journalists when working on stories. We do not go undercover.
- ☞ We do not plagiarize. We properly and fully attribute information from other sources.
- ☞ We do not pay for interviews or otherwise compensate sources.
- ☞ We only quote anonymous sources in stories if deemed absolutely necessary by the editor or another designated supervisor. We will only allow the citation of anonymous sources in cases when we cannot get important information in another way.

In such a case, the journalist will disclose the identity of the unnamed source to the top editor. If an anonymous source is used in a story, we will explain to our audience why we are granting confidentiality.

Anonymity should not be used to allow sources to attack others under a veil of secrecy or avoid responsibility for their words.

- ☞ We will resist legal attempts to force us to disclose the identities of confidential sources.
- ☞ We don't use composite characters or fictional names, ages, places or dates.
- ☞ In order to protect the integrity of the reporting process, sources are not allowed to review stories before they are published. Journalists may, of course, double-check facts and quotes.
- ☞ We do not identify the victims of sex crimes unless they give us permission to do so. We only identify the victims of other crimes when necessary and take their safety into account when doing so.
- ☞ In general, we do not identify minors who are charged with crimes.

II. Dealing with Potential Conflicts

- ⦿ We seek to avoid conflicts of interest. If they are significant and unavoidable, we will disclose them.
- ⦿ Our journalists do not accept gifts or benefits not available to the general public from sources or subjects of our coverage.
- ⦿ Our journalists may accept a meal, honorarium or travel reimbursement for providing a service such as public speaking if doing so does not interfere with their coverage.
- ⦿ Occasionally, grantmakers or other funders make it possible for our journalists to pursue professional travel and research they would not otherwise have had the opportunity to experience, and they may fund lodging and/or food. In the event we partner with a funder in such an endeavor, the sources of all the funds will be clearly disclosed on our site even if no story or content directly results from the expenditure.
- ⦿ Our journalists may accept press passes to events such as conventions, performances and sports events, but only if they are attending for the sole purpose of news coverage. They must not receive special perks.

III. Working with Images

VOSD documentary images, including photography and video, must represent reality.

Our photo editing process involves making minor digital adjustments to photographs, such as routine color correction; adjustments to contrast, exposure and saturation; minor dodging and burning; and cropping. Photos should not be excessively toned, and adjustments must not mislead the viewer or change the meaning of the original image.

Occasionally, photos that were shot in color are digitally converted to black and white.

Posed photographs must not give the appearance that they were spontaneous. Photo illustrations must be denoted as such.

IV. Life Outside Work

- ⦿ We do not engage in activities that would cause the public to question VOSD's standards regarding fairness and accuracy.
- ⦿ We do not give money to politicians or political initiatives, volunteer for campaigns or run for office.
- ⦿ We do not use our role as journalists or as VOSD employees to gain any special favors, benefits or treatment.

(continued)

Life Outside Work (continued):

- ⦿ We may volunteer for community organizations, but our journalists must consult management if any relationship poses a potential conflict with the principles of this code.
- ⦿ Our journalists will disclose to management if they develop close friendships or romantic relationships with any subject of our coverage or anyone who serves as a regular source. They will be reassigned if it is necessary.
- ⦿ Our journalists will disclose to supervisors if a close family member or companion has a potential conflict under this policy. We cannot restrict the activity of such people but may reassign journalists if necessary.
- ⦿ We do not stray from the tenets of this code when we use social networking tools. This also applies to the non-professional use of social networking if the content is accessible to the public and/or the sources we rely upon to do our work.

V. Freelancers and Other Contributors

- ⦿ Freelancers must follow these guidelines at all times when they represent VOSD.
- ⦿ If their work for other clients or their personal activities conflict with the restrictions of this code, freelancers must consult VOSD's management about the proper course of action.
- ⦿ Commentators are expected to disclose their potential conflicts or relationships when they are related to the subject of their writing.
- ⦿ They must disclose to our management when they have given financial or other kinds of support (i.e., volunteer work) to politicians they write about.
- ⦿ They also must disclose any support they have received — such as consulting fees — from the people or organizations they discuss in their commentaries.

VI. The Roles of Donors and Advertisers

- ⦿ Our board of directors determines the overall mission of VOSD. It sets the annual budget and assists with fundraising, management and long-term priorities.
- ⦿ Our website lists our donors/members and is updated on a regular basis.
- ⦿ We encourage the disclosure of our donors' names publicly. Donors at times request anonymity, often because they want to avoid solicitation or have other personal reasons.
- ⦿ We accept anonymous donations as long as it is determined doing so would not harm our credibility. Anonymous donors will remain anonymous to our editorial staff as well.
- ⦿ Members enjoy membership benefits such as invitations to VOSD events, lectures and other educational opportunities.

(continued)

The Roles of Donors and Advertisers (continued):

- ⦿ While members may choose to limit their support to specific types of news coverage (i.e., science or education), they will not exert any control over the coverage itself. Members do not receive special treatment when they are subjects or sources for our news stories, and they do not exert any special control over our editorial product.
- ⦿ We will disclose when our coverage mentions a member of our board of directors.
- ⦿ We do accept donations from our board, staff and outside contributors if offered.
- ⦿ Advertisers must follow the same rules as members.
- ⦿ Advertisements that appear to be news stories are forbidden.

VII. When Mistakes Happen

- ⦿ Our journalists must immediately notify a supervisor when they become aware of an error or when someone asks for a correction or clarification.
- ⦿ At no time will a reporter make the final decision about whether a correction to his or her work is required. A supervising editor will make the decision.
- ⦿ When errors occur, we will correct them promptly and clearly note the correction or clarification in the body of the article.
- ⦿ If an error is severe — resulting in an incorrect, misleading or unfair impression of the significant facts of a story — we will immediately correct the story itself and include a note directly under the headline. We will also make note of the error on the front page of the VOSD website in the This Just In news blog.
- ⦿ Other errors — such as misspelled names and words, poorly worded headlines and grammatical mistakes — will be corrected but may not require written corrections.

VIII. Consequences

Failure to adhere to these guidelines without specific permission from management is a serious offense that could lead to termination.

IX. Keeping Us Honest

If you are aware of any violation of any of these guidelines, let us know.

You may contact VOSD management or any member of the board of directors.

(continued)

Keeping Us Honest (continued):

 For content matters, contact Editor Andrew Donohue:
andrew.donohue@voiceofsandiego.org.

 For business matters, contact CEO Scott Lewis: scott.lewis@voiceofsandiego.org.

X. The Future of the Ethics Code

The world changes fast and it's possible this code does not cover everything. Therefore, this code will likely be updated regularly. If any revisions change what should be expected of us, we will promptly notify the public.