Pro Bono News Editorial Policies

Pro Bono News considers the APC’s General Principles and other Standards of Practice to be a sound statement of ethical behaviour for journalists:

**Accuracy and clarity**

1. Ensure that factual material in news reports and elsewhere is accurate and not misleading, and is distinguishable from other material such as opinion.

2. Provide a correction or other adequate remedial action if published material is significantly inaccurate or misleading.

**Fairness and balance**

3. Ensure that factual material is presented with reasonable fairness and balance, and that writers’ expressions of opinion are not based on significantly inaccurate factual material or omission of key facts.

4. Ensure that where material refers adversely to a person, a fair opportunity is given for subsequent publication of a reply if that is reasonably necessary to address a possible breach of General Principle 3.

**Privacy and avoidance of harm**

5. Avoid intruding on a person’s reasonable expectations of privacy, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.
6. Avoid causing or contributing materially to substantial offence, distress or prejudice, or a substantial risk to health or safety, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.

**Integrity and transparency**

7. Avoid publishing material which has been gathered by deceptive or unfair means, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.

8. Ensure that conflicts of interests are avoided or adequately disclosed, and that they do not influence published material.

**Privacy Principle 1: Collection of personal information**

In seeking personal information, journalists should not unduly intrude on the privacy of individuals and should show respect for the dignity and sensitivity of people encountered in the course of gathering news.

In accordance with Principle 7 of the Council's Statement of General Principles, media organisations should take reasonable steps to avoid publishing material which has been gathered by deceptive or unfair means, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.

Generally, journalists should identify themselves as such. However, journalists and photographers may at times need to operate surreptitiously to expose crime, significantly antisocial conduct, public deception or some other matter in the public interest.

Public figures necessarily sacrifice their right to privacy, where public scrutiny is in the public interest. However, public figures do not forfeit their right to privacy altogether. Intrusion into their right to privacy must be related to their public duties or activities.

**Privacy Principle 2: Use and disclosure of personal information**
Personal information gathered by journalists and photographers should only be used for the purpose for which it was intended. A person who supplies personal information should have a reasonable expectation that it will be used for the purpose for which it was collected.

Some personal information, such as addresses or other identifying details, may enable others to intrude on the privacy and safety of individuals who are the subject of news coverage, and their families. To the extent lawful and practicable, a media organisation should only disclose sufficient personal information to identify the persons being reported in the news, so that these risks can be reasonably avoided.

Privacy Principle 3: Quality of personal information

A media organisation should take reasonable steps to ensure that the personal information it collects is accurate, complete and up-to-date.

Privacy Principle 4: Security of personal information

A media organisation should take reasonable steps to ensure that the personal information it holds is protected from misuse, loss, or unauthorised access.

Privacy Principle 5: Anonymity of sources

All persons who provide information to media organisations are entitled to seek anonymity. The identity of confidential sources should not be revealed, and where it is lawful and practicable, a media organisation should ensure that any personal information derived from such sources that it holds does not identify the source.

Privacy Principle 6: Correction, fairness and balance

In accordance with Principle 3 of the Council's Statement of General Principles, media organisations should take reasonable steps to ensure that factual material is presented
with Statement of Privacy Principles reasonable fairness and balance, and that writers’ expressions of opinion are not based on significantly inaccurate factual material or omission of key facts. In accordance with Principle 4 of the Council's Statement of General Principles, media organisations should take reasonable steps to ensure that where material refers adversely to a person, a fair opportunity is given for subsequent publication of a reply if that is reasonably necessary to address a possible breach of General Principle 3.

A media organisation should take reasonable steps to provide a correction or other adequate remedial action for publishing any personal information that is significantly inaccurate or misleading, in accordance with Principle 2 of the Council's Statement of General Principles. The media organisation should also take steps to correct any of its records containing that personal information, so as to avoid a harmful inaccuracy being repeated.

**Privacy Principle 7: Sensitive personal information**

In accordance with Principle 6 of the Council's Statement of General Principles, media organisations should take reasonable steps to avoid causing or contributing materially to substantial offence, distress or prejudice, or a substantial risk to health or safety, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.

Members of the public caught up in newsworthy events should not be exploited. A victim or bereaved person has the right to refuse or terminate an interview or photographic session at any time.

Unless otherwise restricted by law or court order, open court hearings are matters of public record and can be reported by the press. Such reports need to be fair and balanced. They should not identify relatives or friends of people accused or convicted of crime unless the reference to them is necessary for the full, fair and accurate reporting of the crime or subsequent legal proceedings.
**Additional policies for Pro Bono News**

**Activism** - As a progressive organisation, Pro Bono Australia believes that for some issues, there are not two sides (including, but not exclusive to, civil rights, women's rights, anti-racism, the climate emergency and LGBTIQ+ equality). For example, we would not allow climate deniers to write for us. But when it comes to activism, Pro Bono News must uphold neutral journalism that puts facts first.

**Advertising and sponsored content** - Pro Bono Australia relies on advertising as part of its revenue model, however it is paramount to maintain the separation between sales and editorial. Sponsored content is always labelled as such and the article URL also identifies it as sponsored content. Advertisers have no influence on editorial content.

**Anonymous quotes** - Anonymous quotes are permitted, but not preferred. Journalists should spell out why their source is anonymous and include an explanatory line in the story.

**Attribution** - All quotes are to be attributed. Quotes that have been given directly to Pro Bono News should be noted as such at least once in the story (“told Pro Bono News”). Quotes from other outlets should be attributed to that outlet.

**Copy approval** - As a general rule, no one outside PBA (e.g. an interviewee) should be given the right to have copy approval. As a courtesy journalists may, at their discretion, let someone know how they have been quoted.

**Personal Conflicts of interest** - Conflicts of interest, real or apparent, can arise in many areas. Pro Bono News journalists should be sensitive to how their activities outside work could be perceived as having a bearing on the integrity of our journalism. Staff should be transparent about any outside personal, philosophical or financial interests that might conflict with their professional performance and declare it to management and outside parties where material.
It is always necessary to declare an interest when the journalist is writing about something with which he or she has a significant connection. This applies to both staff journalists and freelancers. Full transparency may mean that the declaration should appear on the website as well.

Pro Bono News should also be careful to acknowledge any conflicts of interest that may occur at an organisational level and acknowledge that relationship in stories.

**Corrections** - Pro Bono News should seek to publish corrections promptly after they come to our attention. The change should be made within the article and the correction should be noted at the bottom. Corrections should be made for errors of fact — not misspellings or typos or broken links.

**Deletions** - News items should not be deleted, unless it is required by law or in extreme cases. If there is information in an article that is incorrect or obsolete, it is acceptable to delete that information and add a brief correction or update explaining what was removed. In all cases the editor must be informed and should approve the correction and the method of correction.

**Differentiating between factual reporting, analysis and opinion** - Make sure different types of content are clearly labelled accordingly (all paid content should be labelled as such).

**Direct quotations** - Should not be changed to alter their context or meaning.

**Fairness** - The more serious the allegation, the greater the obligation to allow the subject the opportunity to respond.

**Independence and integrity** - Maintain the independence and integrity of Pro Bono News. Exercise editorial control over the content that PBA publishes. Ensure that editorial decisions are not improperly influenced by political, sectional, commercial or personal interests.
Internal ‘No Surprises’ policy - The PBA editor and management work on a philosophy of “no surprises”. This means any events, information, activities or mistakes pertinent to our journalism, and work at PBA should be shared proactively with the editor and if relevant, management. This applies to issues both positive or negative.

Payment - In general, Pro Bono Australia does not pay for stories, except from bona fide freelance sources. We do not pay sources for interviews.

Plagiarism - Staff must not reproduce other people’s material without attribution. The source of published material should be acknowledged including quotes taken from other newspaper articles.

Social media - Journalists should refrain from posting anything on social media that could damage the reputation of Pro Bono News. They should be mindful that while personal social media accounts may feel private and separate from their role at Pro Bono News, the reality today is that everything we like or share on social media is to some degree public, and their actions in public may be associated with Pro Bono News.

Suicide - Journalists are asked to exercise particular care in reporting suicide or issues involving suicide, bearing in mind the risk of encouraging others. This should be borne in mind both in presentation, including the use of pictures, and in describing the method of suicide. When appropriate a helpline number should be given.