

Arizona Public Media®

Editorial Standards and Policies

Arizona Public Media® (AZPM) is committed to serving the public interest by providing content of the highest quality that enriches the marketplace of ideas, unencumbered by commercial imperative. Throughout AZPM's history, four fundamental principles have guided that commitment.

- Editorial integrity: AZPM content should embrace the highest commitment to excellence, professionalism, intellectual honesty and transparency. In its news and information content, accuracy should be the cornerstone.
- Quality: AZPM content should be distinguished by professionalism, thoroughness, and a commitment to experimentation and innovation.
- Diversity: AZPM must be responsive to a diverse public and has a responsibility to explore subjects of significance and the marketplace of ideas.
- Editorial Autonomy: Independent decision-making by experienced media professionals ensures topical and relevant content and allows AZPM stations to reflect the communities they serve.

AZPM's responsibility to the public also demands a continuing understanding of emerging technologies and the changing ways the public consumes information.

The *AZPM Editorial Standards and Policies* that follow explain the best practices and procedures expected across multiple platforms and reflect these core principles and philosophy.

I. Introduction

This document is based largely on the *Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) Editorial Standards and Policies*, which were adopted in July, 2011 and are used with the permission of PBS as a member station, and serve as an update of the Arizona Public Media program policies last updated in September, 2011. While the principles embodied in those policies are enduring and remain as valid today as when they were adopted, changes in technology, public media, journalism, public expectations, and experience with the current guidelines necessitate a periodic review of procedures to establish and implement program standards and practices, and a revision of the statement as may be required.

The purpose of this document is to clearly articulate the guiding principles that underpin and inform decisions made by AZPM staff with regard to the selection, production and scheduling of content for its radio and television stations and its online assets.

II. Guiding Principles

AZPM is a public service unit of the University of Arizona (UA). It is managed by a professional staff with the advice and counsel of a Community Advisory Board (CAB) whose members are recruited based on a number of demographic criteria including age, gender, ethnicity, professional experience, and geography, with the intention of reflecting the communities served by AZPM. AZPM's Director and General Manager is a direct report to the UA Senior Vice President for University Relations for all administrative matters. AZPM operates in the public interest by serving the needs of its audiences with editorial independence

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from the University and its administration. Four fundamental principles shape the content service that AZPM provides to its audiences: editorial integrity, quality, diversity, and editorial autonomy.

The mission of AZPM is to “inform, inspire and connect our community by bringing people and ideas together.” Among the values articulated in AZPM’s *Mission, Vision & Values Statement* include the commitment “... to meet the needs and exceed the expectations of audiences” and the mandate that “decisions be guided by what best serves audiences.”

A. Editorial Integrity

AZPM's reputation for quality reflects the public's trust in the editorial integrity of AZPM content and the process by which it is produced, acquired and distributed. To maintain that trust, AZPM and its stations are responsible for shielding the creative and editorial processes from political pressure or improper influence from the state, institution, funders or other sources. AZPM also must make every effort to ensure that the content it produces, acquires and distributes satisfies those editorial standards designed to assure integrity.

B. Quality

In selecting or producing content for any platform, AZPM seeks the highest quality available. Selection and production decisions require professional judgments about many different aspects of content quality including, but not limited to, excellence, creativity, artistry, accuracy, balance, fairness, timeliness, innovation, boldness, thoroughness, credibility, and technical virtuosity. Similar judgments must be made about the content's ability to stimulate, enlighten, educate, inform, challenge, entertain, and amuse audiences.

C. Diversity

To enhance the ability of its media assets to meet audience needs, AZPM strives to offer a wide choice of quality content. Content diversity furthers the goals of a democratic society by enhancing public access to the full range of ideas, information, subject matter, and perspectives required to make informed judgments about the issues of our time. It also furthers public media’s special mandate to serve many different and discrete audiences. The goal of diversity also requires continuing efforts to ensure that AZPM content fully reflects the pluralism of our society, including, for example, appropriate representation of women and minorities. The diversity of public media producers and funders helps to ensure that content produced, acquired and distributed by AZPM is not dominated by any single point of view.

D. Editorial Independence

AZPM, like other university, educational, community, and governmental licensees, maintains a policy of editorial independence, a practice that has its roots in the constitutional guarantees of free speech and a free press. The Federal Radio Act of 1927 originated the basic policy that broadcasters must operate in “the public interest.” A public broadcaster has a defining responsibility to serve the public, not the organization that holds its license or the entity or entities from which it receives financial support. Editorial integrity in this context is marked by a free and independent decision-making process undertaken by professional practitioners who are ultimately accountable to the needs and interests of the citizens of Southern Arizona. Further, the judgment of audiences about the quality and appropriateness of AZPM programming depends in large measure upon their confidence that it is free from undue or improper influence.

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Public media's greatest potential is realized when it serves the unique needs of the local communities and in the acknowledgement that there can be wide variations in local community needs and tastes. No one is better qualified to determine and respond to those local needs than the media professionals employed by AZPM with the advice and counsel of the CAB.

The CAB's role is to assist AZPM's stations in the exercise of their independent responsibilities by providing AZPM management with timely information necessary for the staff to make informed judgments about a program's suitability for local broadcast and helping to make AZPM's content selection process responsive to the needs of the communities it serves.

III. Roles and Responsibilities

AZPM management, content producers, digital content partners, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), National Public Radio (NPR), and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) play essential and distinct roles in content development, acquisition and distribution.

A. AZPM

AZPM is actively involved in the production of original content for and about Southern Arizona, the University of Arizona and the American Southwest, and in encouraging and otherwise fostering the production of quality original content. Program content acquired and distributed by AZPM is produced by people who are generally not employed by AZPM. While producers bear responsibility for content production decisions, AZPM, on behalf of its stations and ultimately the audience, exercises oversight of the integrity of the content. In that role, AZPM is the arbiter of whether content meets these Standards and Policies and whether it is appropriate for acquisition and distribution as part of AZPM's local program services. AZPM bears responsibility and discretion for deciding whether to acquire and distribute content, as well as deciding when to schedule it for local broadcast, link to it or otherwise make it available to audiences.

AZPM and its producers (staff and independent) have a mutual obligation to maintain effective liaison during the production process. The goal of this liaison is to provide opportunities for early notice and resolution of problems. Thus, AZPM has a responsibility to make these Standards and Policies, as well as all applicable AZPM production and funding guidelines, known to producers.

The final authority for the decision to produce, acquire and/or distribute content as part of any AZPM program service rests with AZPM management. AZPM makes its overall decisions about which content to produce, acquire and distribute with a view towards assuring, over time, a diversity of subjects, viewpoints, formats, techniques, and content sources.

AZPM is committed to providing a nonsectarian, nonpolitical, noncommercial educational program service on multiple media platforms. It is expected that a wide range of views and opinions will find expression in various ways across all AZPM content platforms.

B. Producers

AZPM original content is produced by a diverse group that includes television, radio and online staff producers, independent producers (ranging from individual filmmakers to major studios), foreign producers and broadcast organizations (BBC, NHK, etc.), individuals or organizations not normally in the content production business, and, to the extent that they may produce digital content, the subjects themselves.

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Primary responsibility for content necessarily rests with the producer. Generally, producers create the content, and are uniquely positioned to control its elements. Not only would it be impractical for AZPM to second-guess the producer's decisions at each step of the production process, but respect for that process demands that producers be allowed the freedom required for creativity to flourish. Thus, in selecting content for production, acquisition and distribution, AZPM must rely heavily on the producer's honesty, integrity, talent, skill, and good faith.

Producers of content for AZPM have an obligation to inform themselves about and adhere to these Standards and Policies and all applicable AZPM production and funding guidelines.

C. Content Partners

As a licensee of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), each public television and radio licensee bears a non-delegable duty to assure that its broadcast program services fulfill its statutory obligations as a broadcaster. Therefore, AZPM management on behalf of the Arizona Board of Regents and the University of Arizona, is ultimately responsible for assuring an appropriate balance of subjects and viewpoints across its broadcast schedule and for complying with all applicable federal statutes and regulations. While other entities, including the PBS and NPR, may assist AZPM in fulfilling those obligations, final responsibility for the quality and integrity of its broadcast services rests with AZPM.

While AZPM distributes program content through its various program services and stations, AZPM distributes digital content directly to the public, at all times and on a worldwide basis, through its Web site, www.AZPM.org, and other digital platforms and devices. AZPM.org and other digital means also provide access to local community information. AZPM partners may from time-to-time make AZPM digital content available to the public through their own independently operated Web sites.

D. CPB

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting is a private, nonprofit corporation created by Congress in 1967 to distribute federally appropriated funds to public broadcasting organizations nationwide. The Public Broadcasting Act (47 U.S.C. § 396 et seq.) authorizes CPB 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, with strict adherence to objectivity and balance in all programs or series of programs of a controversial nature."

CPB is governed by a Board of Directors whose members are appointees selected by the President of the United States and confirmed for six-year terms by the U.S. Senate. To shield public media producers and distributors from political influence, the Public Broadcasting Act prohibits CPB from owning or operating public television and radio stations and from producing or distributing public television or radio programs. In addition, the Act requires CPB to "carry out its purposes and functions and engage in its activities ... in ways that will most effectively assure the maximum freedom of [public media] from interference with, or control of, program content or other activities."

Each year CPB distributes congressionally appropriated funds to local public broadcasting stations, including AZPM, and other public media distributors and producers. CPB is a major source of funding for public media, and on occasion may provide content or capital equipment funding directly to AZPM.

IV. Editorial Standards

Precision in editorial standards is especially difficult because it is impossible to articulate every criterion that might enter into the evaluation of the quality and integrity of particular content. Moreover, a criterion considered mandatory for straight news reporting may not always be appropriate for a documentary, dramatic, or other types of program or content.

Content evaluation is an art, not a science; it requires professional judgments about the value of content in relation to a broad range of informational, aesthetic, technical, and other considerations. AZPM's task, therefore, is to weigh the merits of the content it acquires, produces, or aggregates such that, viewed in its entirety, the content it distributes strikes the best balance among these considerations. These Standards and Policies embody the goals of integrity and quality to which AZPM aspires, recognizing that judgments about how these standards apply may differ depending on format or subject, and that not all content succeeds equally in satisfying all of these standards.

AZPM recognizes that the producer of informational content deals neither in absolute truth nor in absolute objectivity. Information is by nature fragmentary; the honesty of a program, Web site, or other content can never be measured by a precise, scientifically verifiable formula. Therefore, content quality must depend on the producer's professionalism, independence, honesty, integrity, sound judgment, common sense, open mindedness, and intention to inform, not to propagandize.

Editorial integrity encompasses not only the concerns addressed in these Standards and Policies, but also the concerns about improper funder influence and commercialism. If AZPM concludes that content fails to satisfy AZPM's overall standards of quality or any applicable journalistic standard or production practice, AZPM may reject the content for production, acquisition and distribution.

A. Fairness

Fairness to the audience implies several responsibilities. Producers must neither oversimplify complex situations nor camouflage straightforward facts. AZPM may reject for production, acquisition or distribution a program or other content if AZPM believes that it contains any unfair or misleading presentation of facts, including inaccurate statements of material fact, undocumented statements of fact that appear questionable on their face, misleading juxtapositions, misrepresentations, or distortions.

To avoid misleading the public, producers also should adhere to the principles of transparency and honesty by providing appropriate labels, disclaimers, updates, or other information so that the public plainly understands what it is seeing and/or hearing. For example, content that includes commentary, points of view, or opinion should be appropriately identified, as should all sources of funding.

Transparency also suggests producers maximize attribution of information and limit the use of anonymous sourcing to those cases when there is no alternative and the information is essential. Content that contains adult themes or other sensitive material should contain an appropriate disclosure.

Producers should treat people who are the subjects of, who appear in, or who are referenced in the content they produce with fairness and respect. AZPM will reject content if, in AZPM's judgment, it unfairly treats the people or misrepresents their views.

Fair treatment of individuals generally requires that a producer represent the words and actions of the people portrayed or identified in a way that presents their strongest case, and gives individuals or

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organizations that are the subject of attack or criticism an opportunity to respond. Fairness also requires that a producer be willing to consider all relevant information and points of view.

B. Accuracy

The honesty and integrity of informational content depends heavily upon its factual accuracy. Every effort must be made to assure that content is presented accurately and in context. Programs and other content containing editorials, analysis, commentary, and points of view must be held to the same standards of factual accuracy as news reports. A commitment to accuracy and transparency requires the correction of inaccuracies and errors in a public and visible manner. These principles also require that AZPM and its producers actively respond to feedback and questions from the public.

AZPM may undertake independent verification of the accuracy of content submitted to it. Producers of informational content must exercise extreme care in verifying information, especially as it may relate to accusations of wrongdoing, and be prepared to correct material errors. AZPM will reject content that, in its judgment, fails to meet AZPM's standard of accuracy.

C. Objectivity

Along with fairness and accuracy, objectivity is a third basic tenet to which journalists must adhere and by which the guidelines have recognized AZPM might be judged. While AZPM holds all news and informational content to standards of objectivity, AZPM recognizes that other types of content may not have the objective presentation of facts as their goal.

Objectivity, however, encompasses more than news and information presented in a neutral way. It also refers to the process by which a work was produced, including work that involves analysis or, as a result of reporting, arrives at conclusions. Journalists must enter into any inquiry with an open mind, not with the intent to present a predetermined point of view. Beyond that, for a work to be considered objective, it should reach a certain level of transparency. In a broad sense, this spirit of transparency means the audience should be able to understand the basics of how the producers put the material together. For example, the audience generally should be able to know not only who the sources of information are, but also why they were chosen and what their potential biases might be. As another example, if producers face particularly difficult editorial decisions that they know will be controversial, they should consider explaining why choices were made so the public can understand. Producers should similarly consider explaining to the audience why certain questions could not be answered, including why, if confidential sources are relied upon, the producers agreed to allow the source to remain anonymous.

And the spirit of transparency suggests that if the producers have arrived at certain conclusions or a point of view, the audience should be able to see the evidence so it can understand how the producers arrived at their conclusion. One aspiration implicit in the idea of transparency is that an audience might appreciate and learn from content with which it also might disagree.

Opinion and commentary are different from news and analysis. When a program, segment, digital material or other content is devoted to opinion or commentary, the principle of transparency requires that it be clearly labeled as such.

Any content segment that presents only like-minded views without offering contrasting viewpoints should be considered opinion and should identify who is responsible for the views being presented. No content

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produced, acquired and/or distributed by AZPM should permit conscious manipulation of selected facts in order to propagandize.

D. Balance

AZPM seeks to present, over time, content that addresses a broad range of subjects from a variety of viewpoints. AZPM may, however, choose to consider not only the extent to which the content contributes to balance overall, but also the extent to which a specific piece of content is fairly presented in light of available evidence.

Where appropriate, AZPM may condition acceptance of content for production, acquisition and distribution on the producer's willingness to further the goal of balance by deleting designated elements or by including other points of view or material from which the public might draw conclusions different from those suggested by the content. Material to be added may range from a few words, to a complete content segment, to an added episode in a series of programs, to the production of an entirely separate, new program, or new elements of digital content. For digital content, links to credible, high-quality, related resources may be used to provide access to additional information or viewpoints.

E. Responsiveness to the Public

Producers must work with AZPM to respond to and interact with the public. This may include providing an outlet for public feedback about content and helping to create material for the Web that allows audiences to learn more, seek background information, access documents alluded to in a program, answer questions that a program might not have been able to address, and even customize information. Accountability is a goal of paramount importance and it includes answering audience questions and responding to criticisms about programs or content. When public feedback is published by AZPM it should be labeled as such, and standards for publication -- such as those relating to obscenity or personal attacks -- should be clearly communicated.

F. Courage and Controversy

AZPM seeks content that provides courageous and responsible treatment of issues, and that reports and comments, with honesty and candor on social, political, and economic tensions, disagreements, and divisions. The surest road to intellectual stagnation and social isolation is to stifle the expression of uncommon ideas; today's dissent may be tomorrow's orthodoxy. The ultimate task of weighing and judging information and viewpoints is, in a free and open society, the task of the audience. Therefore, AZPM seeks to assure that its overall content offerings contain a broad range of opinions and points of view, including those from outside society's existing consensus, presented in a responsible manner and consistent with the standards set forth in these Standards and Policies.

G. Substance Over Technique

Advances in production technology carry with them the possibility that technique may overwhelm substance, distorting the information, making it technically inaccessible or distracting the public's attention from its central thrust. Neither people nor ideas ought to be victimized by technical trickery. AZPM will reject content that, in its judgment, disserves the viewer or its subject matter by inappropriately pursuing technique at the expense of substance.

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H. Experimentation and Innovation

AZPM seeks content that is innovative in format, technique, and/or substance. The absence of commercial considerations accords AZPM the freedom to experiment in ways not always tolerable in the commercial environment. The potential for innovation can be fully realized only if AZPM is bold enough to take occasional calculated risks.

Given that freedom and responsibility, AZPM should strive to be a leader in experimenting with innovative techniques for presentation, story-telling, information delivery and engagement with the public, as long as such techniques adhere to the spirit and the understanding of AZPM's editorial standards and guidelines.

I. Exploration of Significant Subjects

Unlike their commercial counterparts, public radio and television stations do not sell time for profit and are, therefore, free from the constraints that compel commercial broadcasters to pursue the largest audience. AZPM seeks programs that will enable its stations and media platforms to explore significant subjects even if those subjects or their treatment may not be expected to appeal to a large audience.

J. Unprofessional Conduct

AZPM expects producers to adhere to the highest professional standards. AZPM may reject content if there is reason to believe that a producer has violated basic standards of professional conduct. Examples of unprofessional conduct by a producer include plagiarism, fabrication, obtaining information by bribery or coercion, insensitivity to tragedy or grief, and real or perceived conflicts of interest such as accepting gifts, favors, or compensation from those who might seek to influence a producer's work. Illegal conduct is on its face unprofessional.

K. Unacceptable Production Practices

It is impossible to anticipate every situation with which a producer of informational content must contend. Nevertheless, certain areas present such frequently encountered dangers that they merit explicit warning. In general, they would fall under two broad concepts:

- Never invent or add elements that were not originally there; and
- Never make choices that mislead or deceive the audience.

These principles, and the intellectual honesty underlying them, also relate to plagiarism and misappropriation. Even as the distributive power of digital technology makes it easier to pass along other content, AZPM and its producers should not take someone else's work and pass it off as their own. The spirit of transparency and intellectual honesty dictates that audiences should clearly understand who the true author of any content is.

In addition:

- **Staging.** Producers of news content should not stage events or suggest that others stage events for the sake of media coverage.
- **Re-creations and Simulations.** In instances where re-creations or simulations of actual events are necessary and desirable, they should be clearly identified if there is any possibility that the viewer would be confused or misled.

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- **Distorted Editing.** All producers face the necessity of selection--which material is to be left in, which is to be edited out. Reducing and organizing this information is part of the producer's craft. It is the objective of the editing process to collect and order information in a manner that fairly portrays reality. Producers must assure that edited material remains faithful in tone and substance to that reality. When editing, producers of informational content must not sensationalize events or create a misleading or unfair version of what actually occurred. When significant interruptions of time or changes of setting occur, they should be unambiguously identified for the viewer.
- **Deception.** The credibility of content is jeopardized whenever the audience or a source is duped or feels duped. Deceiving the audience would include such examples as when time is conflated so that it appears that several interviews were actually one. Duping a source would include a producer misleading an interviewee concerning the purpose of the interview. Honesty, candor, and common courtesy must govern producers' behavior.
- **Pre-trial Publicity.** Our legal system presumes that criminal defendants are innocent until proven guilty. In reporting on crimes and related legal proceedings, producers must be sensitive to the rights of the accused to a fair trial and the effect of pre-trial publicity. Producers should be wary of self-serving statements from both prosecuting and defense attorneys. They should also remain cautious about using alleged evidence in any content to be made available to the public pre-trial.
- **Media Manipulation.** Manipulation can be effected either by the media or by others seeking to use the media for their own purposes. Television, radio and the Web are extraordinarily powerful instruments; the mere presence of cameras and/or microphones can change or influence events. Producers must minimize and, to the extent possible, eliminate this interference. In crowds, demonstrations, and riots, during terrorist incidents, and in other similar circumstances, crews and production teams should seek to be as inconspicuous as possible, and, as appropriate, cap lenses, cease recording or withdraw completely when their presence might incite an extreme reaction or unduly influence the course of events.
- **Manipulation of the Audience.** The use of music and sound effects, dramatic lighting or staging, or other artificial effects can subtly affect 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.

AZPM may reject and decline to broadcast any content that, in its judgment, violates the production practices identified above or shows evidence of any other production practice that is not consistent with accepted professional standards.

L. Objectionable Material

Responsible treatment of important issues may sometimes require the inclusion of controversial or sensitive material, but good taste must prevail in AZPM content. Morbid or sensational details, or material that is gratuitously offensive to general taste or manners (e.g., extreme violence, racial epithets, strong language, nudity, sexism), should not be included unless it is necessary to an understanding of the matter at hand.

Questions of taste cannot be answered in the abstract, but when specific problems arise, they must be resolved in light of contemporary standards of taste, the state of the law, and the newsworthiness and overall value of the material.

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If AZPM concludes that the exclusion of such material would distort an important reality or impair the content's artistic quality, AZPM may accept the content provided it carries appropriate notice to the viewer. Conversely, AZPM may reject content that, in its judgment, needlessly contains objectionable material that compromises the content's quality or integrity.

M. Social Media

Given the mandate of public media as a place to engage citizens, AZPM should engage with the public in all appropriate forms of media and be mindful of how audience behavior is changing. Social media is emerging as an important expression of the marketplace of ideas and a powerful venue by which citizens are interacting with each other and educating themselves.

- **User-Generated Content:** Another feature of digital technology and social media is the expanded dimension of the audience participating in and inspiring public discourse. This user-generated content describes a range of different kinds of material. In general, content from the audience has a special value. It allows those involved in media to interact with the audience in a way that enriches and broadens public engagement. There are various levels of user-generated content—from user comments, to eye witness accounts of events, to video and pictures from the public, to using audiences as sources in stories, and more. AZPM and its producers must strive to accurately and transparently explain their practices and policies for each level of this content. The spirit of transparency also suggests that AZPM and its producers should anticipate when content may raise questions in the minds of audience members or involve controversy, and in those instances, make some effort to explain why the user-content at issue is included. AZPM and producers should also be clear about their expectations for the public in participating and producing content, including tone and level of civility. AZPM and its producers also have a responsibility to solicit and structure the user-generated content in a way that is fair and responsible.

N. Partnerships

As AZPM and its producers enter into formal editorial partnerships and informal collaborations with other organizations and institutions, AZPM should be mindful of the impact on its credibility. As such, AZPM and its producers should help the audience understand who is a formal partner and who is an informal content provider with no ties to AZPM. It should not be assumed that the public will automatically know these differences. If there are questions, steps should be taken to make transparent the relationship between AZPM and linked or distributed content. This is particularly important if links refer audience members to potentially objectionable, controversial or partisan content.

Endorsement



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Susan Tarrence
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