



Online News Association

Code of Ethics

Introduction

As a matter of fundamental principle, the nonprofit and journalistic communities should adhere to the highest ethical standards because it is the right thing to do and because public trust in our performance is the bedrock of our legitimacy. Members, donors and volunteers support nonprofit organizations because they trust them to carry out their missions, to be good stewards of their resources and to uphold rigorous standards of conduct.

Nonprofit organizations must earn this trust every day and in every possible way. But organizations are, at base, people, and it is up to them—board members, executive leaders, staff and volunteers—to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to the core values of integrity, honesty, fairness, openness, respect and responsibility.

This formally adopted code of ethics is one with which all board members, leadership, staff and volunteers should be familiar and to which they should adhere. Transparency, openness and responsiveness to member concerns must be integral to our behavior. These values inform and guide the actions we should take in developing policies and informing practices.

The Code of Ethics

I. Personal and Professional Integrity

All ONA staff, board members and volunteers act with honesty, integrity and openness in all dealings as representatives of the organization. ONA promotes a working environment that values respect, fairness and integrity.

II. Mission and Values

ONA has a clearly stated [mission](#) and purpose -- **inspiring innovation and excellence among digital journalists to better serve the public** -- approved by the board of directors, in pursuit of journalistic excellence and the public good. All of its programs support that mission and all who work for or on behalf of ONA understand that mission and purpose. The mission guides our responsiveness to the constituencies and communities served by the organization and to our profession.

III. Governance

ONA has an active board of directors that is responsible for setting the mission and strategic direction of the organization and overseeing the finances, operations and policies of the organization, and an Executive Director who executes strategy according to that mission and plan.

The ONA board of directors, elected by its membership, is responsible for:

- Having a Nominating Committee is in place that seeks to ensure that board members have the requisite skills and experience to carry out their duties and that all directors understand their governance duties, acting for the benefit of the organization and its public purpose;
- Adopting a conflict of interest policy that is designed to avoid or appropriately manage any conflicts of interest or the appearance thereof through disclosure, recusal or other means;
- Selecting and reviewing of the performance of the executive director, ensuring that the compensation of the executive director is reasonable and appropriate;
- Seeing to it that the treasurer and appropriate staff report to the board with timely and comprehensive information so that it can effectively carry out its duties.
- Seeing to it that ONA conducts all transactions and dealings with integrity and honesty;
- Seeing to it that ONA promotes working relationships with board members, staff, volunteers and members that are based on mutual respect, fairness and openness;
- Seeing to it that ONA is fair and inclusive in its election, hiring and promotion policies and practices for all board, staff and volunteer positions;
- Seeing to it that ONA's policies – Conflict of Interest, Code of Ethics, Document Retention, Diversity and Whistleblower -- are in writing, clearly articulated and officially adopted;
- Seeing to it that ONA's resources are responsibly and prudently managed; and,
- Seeing to it that ONA has the capacity to carry out its programs effectively.

IV. Legal Compliance

ONA is knowledgeable of and complies with all laws, regulations and applicable conventions.

V. Responsible Stewardship

ONA manages its funds responsibly and prudently. This should include the following considerations:

- ONA spends a reasonable percentage of its annual budget on programs in pursuit of its mission and to benefit its membership;
- ONA spends an adequate amount on administrative expenses to ensure effective accounting systems, internal controls, competent staff and other expenditures critical to professional management;
- ONA compensates staff, and any others who may receive compensation, reasonably and appropriately;
- ONA does not accumulate operating funds excessively;
- ONA, if it should become the beneficiary of an endowment, will prudently draw from endowment funds consistent with donor intent and to support the public purpose of the organization;
- ONA ensures that all spending practices and policies are fair, reasonable and appropriate to fulfill its mission; and,
- All financial reports are factually accurate and complete in all material respects.

VI. Openness and Disclosure

ONA provides comprehensive and timely information to the public, the media and all stakeholders and is responsive in a timely manner to reasonable requests for information. All information about the organization will fully and honestly reflect the policies and practices of the organization. Basic informational data about ONA, such as the Form 990 and audited financial statements, will be posted on the organization's website or otherwise available to the public. All solicitation materials accurately

represent ONA's policies. All financial, organizational and program reports will be complete and accurate in all material respects.

VII. Program Evaluation and Member Benefits

ONA regularly reviews program effectiveness and has mechanisms to incorporate lessons learned into future programs. The organization is committed to improving program and organizational effectiveness and develops mechanisms to promote learning from its activities. The organization is responsive to changes in its field of activity and is responsive to the needs of its members and its constituencies.

VIII. Inclusiveness and Diversity

ONA has a policy of promoting inclusiveness and its staff, board and volunteers reflect diversity in order to enrich its programmatic effectiveness, including a Diversity Statement of Principles. The organization takes meaningful steps to promote inclusiveness in its hiring, retention, promotion, board recruitment and members and constituencies served.

IX. Fundraising

ONA, in raising funds from the public or from donor institutions, is truthful in its solicitation materials, respects the privacy concerns of individual donors and expends funds consistent with donor intent. It also discloses important and relevant information to potential donors.

In raising funds from the public, ONA respects the rights of donors:

- To be informed of ONA's mission, the way the resources will be used and the capacity to use donations effectively for their intended purposes;
- To be informed of the identity of those serving on the organization's board and to expect the board to exercise prudent judgment in its stewardship responsibilities;
- To have access to the organization's most recent audited financial reports and 990 forms;
- To be assured their gifts will be used for the purposes for which they were given;
- To receive appropriate acknowledgement and recognition;
- To be assured that information about their donations is handled with respect and with confidentiality to the extent provided by the law;
- To be informed whether those seeking donations are volunteers, employees of the organization or hired solicitors;
- To have the opportunity for their names to be deleted from mailing lists that the organization may intend to share; and,
- To feel free to ask questions when making a donation and to receive prompt, truthful and forthright answers.¹

¹ These ten points are taken from A Donor Bill of Rights, developed by the American Association of Fund Raising Counsel, the Association for Healthcare Philanthropy, the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, and the Association of Fundraising Professionals, and endorsed by INDEPENDENT SECTOR.