

Granite State **NEWS COLLABORATIVE**

Connecting New Hampshire

Granite State News Collaborative Standards and Practices

*Adapted from SPJ and PBS guidelines

The Granite State News Collaborative's Editorial Standards and Practices articulate the core principles that ensure the quality and integrity of all content distributed by its members and contributors. These standards are the cornerstone of the Collaborative's commitment to serving the public interest and preserving the public's trust.

Everyone who creates, evaluates, or oversees content for GSNCs is responsible for familiarizing themselves with and adhering to these standards, as well as related GSNC policies on content funding and production.

These standards, which are periodically reviewed and revised by GSNC, are not intended to address every question that may arise when creating or evaluating content; rather, they are meant to provide a critical resource for encouraging and facilitating discussion about whether content is suitable for distribution by GSNC.

When in doubt about how best to interpret and apply these standards, please reach out to GSNC Board Members or Executive Staff.

Digital, or Standards & Practices staff.

I. Granite State News Collaborative Mission

The Granite State News Collaborative is a statewide multimedia news collaborative that draws on and amplifies the strengths of its members to expand and add missing dimensions to coverage of issues of concern to the NH public as a whole, as well as to particular communities. Through coordinated reporting and engagement activities, the Collaborative will pursue inclusive and responsive coverage that builds public trust and holds government accountable to its citizens.

GSNC is a membership organization that, in collaboration with its member outlets across the state, serves the public interest through content that informs the public and holds those in power accountable.

Content distributed by GSNC should reflect the highest standards of quality, demonstrate a rigorous commitment to editorial integrity unencumbered by commercial imperatives, and further society's fundamental interest in informed civil discourse.

The hallmark of GSNC content is editorial integrity. GSNC members must shield the editorial process from political pressure or improper influence from content funders in order to maintain the highest level of trust.

GSNC strives to offer content that expresses diverse perspectives and furthers the goals of a democratic society. GSNC does this by giving the public access to content on a range of issues so that they can participate in civic dialogue and make informed judgments about the significant issues of the day. In doing so, GSNC aims to reflect the pluralism of society and address the needs of unserved and underserved audiences.

III. EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

The following Editorial Principles are the cornerstone of editorial integrity that foster trust in GSNC content.

These principles — all of which are of equal importance — govern those who produce content for GSNC, who must apply them in good faith and using their best judgment.

Through these principles, GSNC aims to keep a promise of providing content that is objective and balanced.

These Editorial Principles apply to content distributed by GSNC on all platforms, including social media and other emerging technologies, which are addressed more fully in Section IV.B below. Given that platforms differ in terms of format, tone, voice, and audience expectations, the interpretation and application of these core principles will necessarily consider those factors.

Similarly, judgments about how best to interpret and implement these principles may differ depending on the content's subject and the intended audience.

For instance, though opinion or commentary content regarding a particular subject do not necessarily need to express all possible viewpoints, such content does need to rigorously uphold the principle of transparency by making it clear to the audience why a particular opinion was explored and why particular sources were chosen.

GSNC recognizes that it is impossible to anticipate every circumstance that may arise in the production of content, and ensuring the editorial integrity of content depends on the professionalism and thoughtfulness of those producing content for GSNC.

Editorial Independence

Editorial independence is essential to serving the public interest and preserving the public's trust. Content distributed by GSNC must be free of undue influence from third-party funders, political interests, and other outside forces. GSNC must remain unwavering in its commitment to distributing content that exemplifies ethical and journalistic integrity rather than advancing commercial interests. This obligation is achieved through the good-faith professional judgment of those producing content for GSNC and by carefully listening to the public.

Editorial independence gives producers the intellectual freedom to achieve the other principles below.

Accuracy

Accuracy means honesty, fidelity to facts, and humility on the part of those producing content for GSNC to question their own assumptions about the subjects they are handling. Accuracy includes more than simply verifying whether information is correct; facts must be placed in sufficient context based on the nature of the piece to ensure that the public is not misled.

For example, facts can lack necessary context if they are presented in a way that omits important details, quotes someone without correctly reflecting what the person was asked, or distorts what occurred. Those producing content for GSNC must also be mindful of the language used to frame the facts to avoid deceiving or misleading the audience or encouraging false inferences.

A commitment to accuracy also requires gathering, updating, and promptly correcting information as a story develops. Those producing content for GSNC must exercise the highest level of care in verifying information, especially when it relates to any accusations of wrongdoing.

Fairness

Those producing content for GSNC must consider all relevant facts and perspectives on a particular subject and present information in a respectful and responsible manner — without favoritism or discrimination. Fairness does not require that equal time be given to conflicting opinions or viewpoints. Fairness does, however, require those producing content for GSNC be

open-minded when evaluating the merits and assessing the credibility of all opinions or viewpoints while also managing their own personal opinions and biases.

One purpose of fairness is for audiences to appreciate and learn from content, even if they disagree with its conclusions. Fairness also requires that producers carefully represent the words and actions of individuals they interview or otherwise cover. Producers must never manipulate the views of those individuals in an effort to cast them in stereotypical roles or to support predetermined perspectives. Instead, those producing content for GSNC must be mindful of the culture, history, and social customs of those individuals when presenting their views. Those producing content for GSNC must give those they cover the opportunity to present their strongest case, while always providing appropriate context to the audience, and those producing content for GSNC must give those who are the subject of attack or criticism a reasonable opportunity to respond.

Transparency

Transparency is the principle that content should be produced in a way that allows the audience to evaluate the credibility of the work and determine for themselves whether it is trustworthy.

Those producing content for GSNC must be open with the audience — to the extent practical — about how the work was done. Being transparent is the proof, in effect, that the editorial principles outlined in these standards are living principles that inform a professional and ethical editorial process — not simply words on a page.

While specific methods may vary by circumstance and platform, transparency means respecting that the audience is entitled to understand significant underlying editorial decisions. If those producing content for GSNC arrive at a certain conclusion or a point of view, the audience should be able to evaluate how that conclusion or view was reached. Those producing content for GSNC who face difficult editorial decisions should consider explaining why certain choices were made; if relevant questions cannot be answered, those producing content for GSNC should endeavor to explain why.

Sources must be clearly identified, and, in those rare instances when confidential sources need to be used, producers must explain the decision to allow anonymity. Transparency also means using labels or other disclosures when presenting information that might be unclear or confusing to the audience. Finally, transparency requires that producers disclose to the audience all sources of funding for the production and distribution of content.

Inclusiveness

GSNC strives to contribute to informed debate by presenting, over time, content that addresses a broad range of ideas, information, and perspectives. Inclusiveness means that content should reflect the views of people from different backgrounds, such as geographic areas, ethnicities, genders, age groups, religious beliefs, political viewpoints, and income levels.

Those producing content for GSNC must remain accountable and responsive to the audience. Accountability requires those producing content for GSNC to stand by their work and to be prepared and willing to respond to relevant inquiries about it, including through active and thoughtful digital engagement with the audience.

Accountability also means that those producing content for GSNC must adhere to the highest professional standards of conduct and diligently pursue and report the truth. Conflicts of interest must be avoided, and any real or perceived conflicts that could have the appearance of influencing content must be disclosed to GSNC.

Those producing content for GSNC must correct errors, in close consultation with GSNC, as soon as they determine that errors occurred. Those producing content for GSNC must also work closely with GSNC to respond in a timely manner, and to the best of their abilities, to questions or criticisms from the public about significant editorial decisions or ethical issues related to content.

IV. APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES

This section provides guidance on how best to put the Editorial Principles into practice. GSNC may require changes to the content, changes to the production process, the addition of supplemental materials, prominent disclosures to the audience, or decline to distribute content that, in its judgment, violates these best practices or other practices that are not consistent with the highest professional standards of editorial integrity.

The Application of Principles is expected to evolve over time because the media landscape is rapidly changing.

Unlike the Editorial Principles themselves, which are intended to serve as the bedrock on which GSNC content is created no matter the platform, the interpretation and application of these principles may evolve as new methods of distribution and audience engagement are developed. While the Editorial Principles are designed to be platform neutral, the application of these principles will be adapted to account for audience expectations and the unique constraints and opportunities of various distribution platforms.

A. APPLICATION TO ALL GSNC CONTENT

While it is not possible to address all issues that will arise in applying the Editorial Principles, the most common best practices for implementing these principles for all types of content distributed by GSNC include the following:

1. Implement Fact-Checking Procedures

Those producing content for GSNC must implement rigorous fact-checking procedures to verify the accuracy of all factual assertions. As part of these procedures, producers should be able to identify the source for each asserted fact and why that source is reliable. As a general rule, at least two authoritative, independent sources should be on the record before controversial assertions are included in content for distribution by GSNC. The accuracy of assertions by expert and non-expert interviewees should never be assumed, particularly if such assertions are contentious or otherwise questionable. Producers should also pay careful attention to the accuracy of names and titles, dates, places, statistics, and foreign language translations.

2. Correct Errors Promptly and Clearly

Those producing content for GSNC are responsible for correcting errors in a timely manner that is abundantly clear to the audience.

Those producing content for GSNC must immediately bring to GSNC's attention the discovery of any significant errors, and those producing content for GSNC should regularly inform GSNC of all other errors so that GSNC can monitor trends and ensure accountability.

Those producing content for GSNC must also be responsive to the public when errors are brought to their attention, and in doing so, those producing content for GSNC must closely cooperate with GSNC in communicating any necessary corrections to the public.

3. Permit Anonymity Sparingly

GSNC does not as a rule permit the use of anonymous sources. In very rare circumstances, it may be permitted and the following guidelines adhered to:

Anonymous sources should be used when granting anonymity is the only practical way to obtain important information. Those producing content for GSNC must explain to the audience why they are withholding the identity of the source and why the source is credible. When using information from a source who must remain anonymous, those producing content for GSNC should — to the extent practical — describe (without revealing the source's identity) how the source knows the information, the source's motivations (if any), why anonymity was required, and any other details that will help the audience evaluate the source's credibility. Anonymous sources generally should not be used to provide opinion, speculation, or hearsay.

They are best used when they offer information that then can be subsequently verified with on-the-record sources.

Those producing content for GSNC are expected to treat each determination to grant anonymity as a significant executive-level decision, and those producing content for GSNC will be asked to review such determinations with GSNC.

4. Identify Real or Perceived Conflicts of Interest

Those producing content for GSNC must not accept gifts, favors, or compensation from individuals and businesses that they cover (other than tokens of nominal value). Such gifts, favors, or compensation could have the appearance of influencing content, regardless of the intent, and should be politely refused. Those producing content for GSNC must inform GSNC about any real or perceived conflicts of interest throughout the production process. This includes any financial or personal interests, or the activities of family members, companions, or close relatives that could reasonably be perceived as having the potential to influence the producer's work. Producers also should avoid engaging in political activities or public expressions that could reasonably be perceived as undermining their ability to produce impartial content.

For example, while those producing content for GSNC may wish to publicly share certain views, those producing content for GSNC must ensure that those views do not create a real or perceived conflict of interest with projects that they are actively developing for GSNC.

In some cases, a real or perceived conflict of interest can be addressed by prominently disclosing it to the audience. In other instances, a real or perceived conflict of interest may require certain changes to the content, necessitate changes to the production process, or prevent GSNC from accepting the content for distribution.

5. Include a Diversity of Voices

Those producing content for GSNC should incorporate diverse perspectives as a way of making content more inclusive, accurate, and complete.

6. Do Not Generally Pre-Screen Content for Interested Parties

Work in progress (including rough cuts, fine cuts, and segments) generally should not be previewed for funders, interviewees, or outside parties that may exert undue influence. The editorial process must remain free from any attempt to influence or interfere with the professional judgments of producers and GSNC.

7. Attribute Non-Original Materials

Audiences should be able to clearly understand the source of information. As digital technology makes it easier to share and redistribute content, those producing content for GSNC must exercise care to never re-use someone else's work and pass it off as their own. Those producing content for GSNC should provide attribution at any point when doing so would help the audience better understand the material.

8. Publish Documentation of Sources

Those producing content for GSNC should make publicly available materials that document their sources whenever feasible. If content is later challenged or called into question, those producing content for GSNC must be prepared to make responsive information available to GSNC.

9. Verify User-Generated Content

User-generated content consists of various materials created by members of the public, including videos and images, eyewitness accounts of events, and social media comments. Use of such content can be valuable, but those producing content for GSNC need to act judiciously and proceed with caution before deciding to use material that they cannot independently verify. Those producing content for GSNC should not assume that such content is accurate or authentic, and they should take reasonable steps to contextualize the content and to confirm its veracity. If those producing content for GSNC decide that using such content will inform and educate the audience, they must take care to describe where it came from, to what extent and how it was verified, and why they decided to include it. Whenever possible and appropriate, those producing content for GSNC should seek permission from the originator of user-generated content for its use.

10. Consider How Editorial Partnerships Impact GSNC's Credibility

GSNC and its producers may from time to time enter into editorial partnerships with other media organizations, educational or cultural institutions, freelance journalists, or other parties. While these collaborations are generally encouraged, GSNC should be mindful of the potential impact on GSNC's credibility, and they must ensure that all editorial partners adhere to these standards. The principle of transparency also requires that any such partnerships be clearly disclosed to the audience.

11. Use Labels and Other Disclosures to Aid Audience's Understanding

Those producing content for GSNC must use labels and other visual or verbal disclosures to present information that allows the audience to better understand, and make informed judgments about, content. Disclosures are also required to put the audience on notice about graphic images or language that they might wish to avoid. Those producing content for GSNC should use their discretion in determining how best to implement these disclosures while being mindful that they must be clear and concise to ensure that the audience can easily absorb the information.

12. Clearly Identify Opinion and Commentary

Those producing content for GSNC must identify for the audience in a clear and consistent manner material that is opinion or commentary, and communicate to the audience whose views are being presented. GSNC considers opinion or commentary to be content that reflects a particular point of view or observations on a topic without presenting relevant contrasting facts and perspectives. To be fully transparent, it is important to include such identifications at both the beginning and end of content. Opinion or commentary can be given great latitude with respect to personal and artistic expression so long as it is not inaccurate or defamatory. However, such content must never manipulate selected facts in order to propagandize.

13. Be Cautious with Pre-Trial Coverage

The United States legal system presumes that defendants are innocent until proven guilty in criminal proceedings.

While reporting on both civil and criminal proceedings is often in the public interest, the principle of fairness requires that those producing content for GSNC must be sensitive to the potential effects of pre-trial coverage on those accused of wrongdoing. Those producing content for GSNC should view with skepticism any self-serving statements from attorneys representing a party to the proceeding. Those producing content for GSNC should also be cautious about using any alleged evidence that is made available to the public before trial.

14. Avoid Gratuitously Offensive or Objectionable Material

While controversial and sensitive material may need to be included in GSNC content, material that is gratuitously offensive (e.g., extreme violence, racial epithets, sexism, graphic language, or nudity) should not be included unless it is essential to understanding the matter at hand and does not violate federal law governing indecent and profane content. Material that is included merely to shock or draw attention and that does not impart valuable information is gratuitous.

Given that questions of taste cannot be answered in the abstract, specific issues should be resolved in consultation with GSNC Board and Executive staff in light of contemporary standards of taste, the law, and the newsworthiness of the material. If GSNC concludes that the exclusion of such material would distort an important reality or impair the content's artistic quality, GSNC may condition distribution of the content on providing audiences with sufficiently clear advance notice.

B. APPLICATION TO SOCIAL MEDIA AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

GSNC encourages those producing content for GSNC to engage with the audience on social media platforms while also using reasonable discretion and carefully considering whether their interactions have the potential to compromise GSNC's nonpartisan reputation and the public's trust.

Those producing content for GSNC, who are communicating with the public on behalf of GSNC by using official social media channels or specific program channels have a heightened responsibility to ensure that they consistently adhere to the Editorial Principles. Examples of important best practices for implementing these principles include:

1. Exercise Civility

Social media can be a useful platform for conversation and debate about content. GSNC encourages robust digital engagement with the audience to solicit and encourage diverse views

and perspectives, particularly when the content at issue involves opinion or commentary. When engaging with the public on social media, however, those producing content for GSNC and GSNC staff need to avoid getting drawn into personal attacks or other angry exchanges. They should instead strive to facilitate a civil exchange of ideas and learning.

2. Treat Errors Just as Seriously as on Other Platforms

Despite the informal and fast-paced nature of social media, Those producing content for GSNC should strive to avoid distributing factual errors or misleading information. Mistakes should be treated as seriously as when they occur on other distribution platforms. In the event of an error, it is GSNC practice to promptly put out a new social media post with the correct information and to clearly explain what was wrong with the prior post. In the interest of transparency, the audience also should be able to view the edit history of the post whenever possible, depending on the capabilities of the social media platform where the post occurred. It is generally not appropriate to simply delete the erroneous content without maintaining a public record in some manner, such as a screenshot or other acknowledgment.

3. Prevent Conflicts of Interest

While those producing content for GSNC and their editorial staff may wish to publicly share certain beliefs or opinions on social media, those producing content for GSNC must ensure that those views do not create real or perceived conflicts of interest with projects that they are actively developing for GSNC. Those producing content for GSNC must avoid engaging in public expression that could reasonably be perceived as undermining their ability to produce impartial content. Those producing content for GSNC also must be cognizant that when they or their staff hold themselves out as affiliated with GSNC, any beliefs or opinions shared on social media will inevitably reflect back on GSNC. For this reason, producers should evaluate the social media accounts of their editorial staff to ensure that the independence and credibility of the content and the reputation of GSNC is maintained.

4. Provide Adequate Context

When posting information, particularly information that is sensitive or controversial, Those producing content for GSNC should pause to consider whether particular social networks allow for proper context. For example, multiple tweets might be needed to accurately and fairly convey information or to adequately answer questions about complex subjects.

5. Avoid Sensationalizing to Generate Clicks

While those producing content for GSNC are encouraged to write clever and engaging social media posts, they must avoid sensationalizing content or providing misleading headlines in an effort to artificially generate interest.

6. Vet Third-Party Content

When sharing information from third parties, those producing content for GSNC should be transparent about where the information came from and judicious about what information is appropriate to share. Every effort must be made to prevent the transmission of false information. News generally should only be reported from legitimate, bona fide sources (e.g., other news organizations such as the Associated Press) after exercising due diligence to verify that the information originated from an authentic account. Care also should be taken to ensure that the sharing of opinions and commentary is not viewed as an endorsement by GSNC. When using a video or photograph from a third party, those producing content for GSNC should strive to ensure that it has not been manipulated — for example, by checking the metadata. If third-party content contains graphic or sensitive material, it may be appropriate to add a clear upfront disclosure or to simply not link to such content.

C. APPLICATION TO PRODUCTION PRACTICES

Those producing content for GSNC should strive to be leaders in experimenting with innovative techniques for presentation, story-telling, information delivery, and engagement with the public. However, those producing content for GSNC should not make choices that could deceive the audience, such as inventing or adding misleading elements that were not originally present.

Examples of other important best practices for applying the Editorial Principles include:

1. Edit for Brevity and Clarity, Not to Distort

All producers face the necessity of selection — which material to leave in and which material to edit out. Reducing and organizing information is a fundamental part of the producer’s craft. The objective of the editing process is to collect and order information in a manner that fairly and accurately portrays reality. Those producing content for GSNC must ensure that edited material remains faithful in tone and substance to that reality; they should not sensationalize events or create a misleading version of what actually occurred. For instance, when editing an interview for brevity or sequencing, those producing content for GSNC must ensure that such edits do not change the meaning or context of the interviewee’s responses.

2. Do Not Stage Events

Those producing content for GSNC should not stage events that did not occur or suggest that others stage events that did not occur for the sake of media coverage with the intent to mislead or deceive the audience.

3. Do Not Deceive the Audience

The credibility of content is jeopardized whenever the audience or a source is deceived or might feel deceived. Deceiving the audience includes conflating time so that it appears that several interviews were actually one or presenting taped material in a manner perceived as live. So as not to deceive a source, interviewers generally should be clear about the purpose of the interview.

