

# **BAY AREA NEWS GROUP ETHICS POLICY**

## **PREAMBLE**

The Bay Area News Group is committed to the highest ethical standards. Fairness and accuracy are among our core values. But perhaps nothing stands above the need for the newspaper to maintain and preserve its integrity. The public's trust in our work - our most important asset - depends on it.

This document is meant to provide general guidance to BANG staffers on the many difficult ethical questions that arise in the course of doing our jobs. But because not every situation can be anticipated, it is useful to keep two particular guidelines in mind.

- 1.) None of us should act in ways that could damage the newspaper's credibility. Many complicated issues – from political involvement to attribution to freelance policy – can be navigated easily with that principle in mind.
- 2.) Any situation that raises questions of credibility ought to be discussed with a ranking editor. None of us should decide such issues alone.

We are all collectively responsible for ethical standards. Any employee who is aware that a fellow staff member has committed ethical violations should immediately bring the matter to the attention of a ranking editor.

## **PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES AND STANDARDS**

### **FAIRNESS AND ACCURACY**

The Bay Area News Group strives to operate with fairness, accuracy and independence. To that end:

- Whenever possible, the Bay Area News Group seeks opposing views and solicits responses from those whose conduct is questioned in news stories.

- Errors, whether made by the reporter, editor or source, shall be acknowledged promptly in a straightforward correction, not disguised or glossed over in a follow-up story.
- Reporters or photographers ought to identify themselves to news sources. In the rare instance when circumstances suggest not identifying ourselves, the Executive Editor, Managing Editor or appropriate senior editor must be consulted for approval.
- Employees should not plagiarize, whether it is the the wholesale lifting of someone else's writing, or the publication of a press release as news without attribution.

### **UNIDENTIFIED SOURCES**

In general, we should avoid the use of unnamed sources. We will attribute information to unnamed sources only when news value warrants and it cannot be obtained any other way.

When forced to rely on unnamed sources, we will avoid letting them be the sole basis for any story. We will not allow unnamed sources to make personal attacks.

We should describe the unnamed source in as much detail as possible to indicate the source's credibility. Simply attributing a comment to "a source" is inadequate.

Additionally, whenever possible readers should be told the reason the source requested or was given anonymity.

A reporter must identify any unnamed source to his or her editor and the editor must ask for the identity of any unnamed source used in the story. In cases where the assigning editor judges the story to be of importance, of a sensitive nature or has any questions about using the unnamed source, that editor needs to bring the story to a department head for discussion and approval.

To the extent possible, we should apply our own standards to the use of unnamed sources in stories produced by other newspapers or wire services. In cases where there are significant conflicts between the attribution of information in the wire story and the Bay Area News Group policy on unattributed sources, an effort should be made to contact the originating news agency for more information

### **QUOTATIONS AND ATTRIBUTION**

Quotations should always be the exact words that someone spoke, with the exception of minor corrections in grammar and syntax. Parentheses within quotations are almost never appropriate and can almost always be avoided. Ellipses should also be avoided.

We generally should explain when a quote was received in a manner other than an interview: via e-mail, in a prepared statement, in a televised press conference. In cases where we conduct an interview through a translator, we should identify quotes received in that manner.

A reporter should not make it sound as if a source made a statement to the reporter if, in fact, it came to us through a third party.

### **BYLINES, DATELINES AND CREDIT LINES**

Bylines, datelines and credit lines should accurately convey to readers the source of our reporting.

In multiple bylines, the first name generally should be that of the reporter who wrote the article, or if different, of the largest contributor. This most directly tells readers who is responsible for the content. We should treat material from our Bay Area News Group colleagues at partner newspapers just as the work of our individual newspaper's staff.

When a reporter writes an article based in part on wire service reports and in part on the reporter's own work, the article should carry the reporter's byline and a credit to the wire service in a tagline. If the reporter independently reports the facts of the story, the byline can stand alone. If the reporter simply inserts some local material, the byline should be the originating source with a reporter's credit at the end.

When adding a wire-service quote to a story, particularly if it is exclusive information or an anonymous quote, indicate the source: "Bush isn't going to run for re-election," a senior administration official told the Washington Post.

### **MEALS, TICKETS, TRAVEL POLICY**

As a general rule, we pay our own way.

The Bay Area News Group will pay for meals and drinks shared with news sources and for meals that are covered as news events. When the cost of a meal includes a sum tacked on to raise funds, we will pay only what we estimate to be the price of the meal.

Whenever complimentary meals are supplied at press events, staff members should calculate about how much their portions cost and then reimburse the coordinator of the event.

Staff members may accept free admission to plays, concerts and other performances and sporting events only for the purpose of reviewing them or covering them for the Bay Area News Group.

Transportation and other expenses necessary for the performance of professional duties shall be paid by the Bay Area News Group in all possible cases - including travel on the press plane of a political candidate or sports team.

### **GIFTS AND SAMPLE PRODUCTS**

Employees should not accept or solicit business-connected gifts or free services. Items received whose value is greater than \$25 should be returned or donated to a charity. Items that are of token or insignificant value (under \$25), such as calendars, pencils or key chains, may be accepted if returning them would be awkward. Books, compact discs, sample food products, software or other items sent to the Bay Area News Group for review purposes are accepted as news releases. These items should never, under any circumstances, be sold for personal profit.

### **OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES AND CONFLICTS**

#### **FINANCIAL HOLDINGS**

Employees should not have a financial connection to anything they cover, whether it be owning stock or other form of investment, holding an outside job, or receiving a fee for service or preferential treatment that has an economic value. Conflicts involving the financial interests of spouses or close family members should also be avoided. If you have questions about what poses a conflict of interest, it is your responsibility to obtain direction from the Managing Editor or appropriate senior editor

#### **FREELANCING**

Freelancing by staff members is permissible, with some restrictions. Bay Area News Group staffers may not work for media that are in direct competition with the paper. Direct competition is defined as daily and weekly newspapers that originate in nine adjoining Bay Area counties (Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Benito, Alameda, San Mateo, San Francisco, Contra Costa and San Joaquin.) The Wall Street Journal, the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times are also considered direct competitors, as are Web sites that are focused on communities within BANG's distribution footprint or primary areas of coverage, including the Silicon Valley and technology. The same is true of local radio and television programs that target our core content. Any questions as to

what constitutes “media in direct competition” should be addressed with the Managing Editor or appropriate senior editor. Any exceptions must also be addressed with the Managing Editor or appropriate senior editor.

Freelancing for magazines that originate in the Bay Area (such as Sunset and San Francisco Magazine) is permitted after possibilities for publication in Bay Area News Group papers have been explored, and a supervisor has been notified of the assignment.

Bay Area News Group staffers must not scoop their news organization. Breaking news, enterprise stories and noteworthy items about the people you cover should be reserved for the paper and its electronic publications.

Information that appears first in a Bay Area News Group paper may be recast to appear in a national publication. The writer will be identified as a BANG staffer whenever possible. Immediate supervisors must always be notified when staffers intend to use their newspaper for identification purposes in freelance work, even for purposes of freelance work for a publication that is not in direct competition with their own publication.

When freelancing for a print publication, it is important not to allow the publisher to automatically claim online rights. There are cases where a print publication does not compete with the paper, but the publication's online site does. Check with a supervisor before granting online rights.

### **ONLINE FREELANCING**

Generally, freelancing for online sites shall follow the guidelines for print. However, online is developing so rapidly and business alliances are so fluid, it is difficult to draw a definite line between what Bay Area News Group staffers can and cannot do. Decisions are best made on a case-by-case basis, considering both the competition and the opportunities for cross-promotion.

Staffers will need to notify a supervisor to freelance for online publications that compete directly with MediaNews digital sites. Once again, given the broad nature of what constitutes an online publication in direct competition, any questions as to what constitutes a direct competitor should be addressed with the Managing Editor or appropriate senior editor. When freelancing online, the staffer, when appropriate, is to be identified with their individual newspaper. Whenever possible, a cross-link between the site and MediaNews digital sites will be established.

### **USE OF COMPANY PROPERTY WHILE FREELANCING**

Staffers may make reasonable use of company equipment or resources while freelancing for outside publications.

What is "reasonable"? Using a computer after work hours; doing a limited number of searches on Lexis-Nexis.

What is "not reasonable"? Using a company car to drive to and from a freelance assignment. Using photo department resources to process and print film shot for a freelance assignment. Using a news librarian to do research for a freelance assignment.

### **RADIO AND TELEVISION**

Staffers asked to appear on shows where the appearance is related to the staffer's area of expertise should obtain the approval of a supervisor. The guest must be clearly identified as a staffer at his or her Bay Area News Group paper.

### **HONORARIUMS**

When invited, Bay Area News Group staff members are permitted to speak before trade groups, community organizations, etc., but should not accept speaking fees. Instances where a staff member will be permitted to accept expenses or fees as part of a speaking engagement will be decided on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the staff member's supervisor, using ethics -- not economics -- as the overriding factor.

In the event the presentation is a professional seminar before a group of peers, staff members are permitted to accept expenses for travel.

### **CONNECTIONS**

Employees shall not use their positions with the Bay Area News Group to get any benefit or advantage in commercial transactions or personal business for themselves, their families, friends or acquaintances.

Employees shall not use the company name, reputation, phone number or stationery to imply a threat of retaliation or pressure, to curry favor or to seek personal gain.

### **OUTSIDE AND ONLINE ACTIVITY**

Staff members should avoid outside activities that could conflict with their jobs. In almost all cases, it would be a clear conflict to accept appointive office, run for elective office, or work on a political campaign. Freelance PR work or other outside jobs can also raise concerns. Any employee considering such endeavors should talk to a supervisor.

Staff members should avoid advertising or blatantly espousing viewpoints on public issues in professional or public settings. Reporters and editors should be aware that such blatant espousal casts doubt upon their impartiality and the newspaper's credibility. Staff members should also avoid signing petitions or otherwise identifying themselves with causes they are expected to cover.

Staff members should also avoid espousing viewpoints on public issues or individuals online unless offering opinion is part of their job. Given the public nature of online posts and other sharing of content – even those on an ostensibly private social network -- it is critical that we do nothing that might cast doubt on our impartiality when reporting the news.

In some common-sense circumstances, staffers may offer opinions about topics that are sufficiently distinct from their job duties (the city hall reporter could do movie reviews on his blog, for instance). Online, as in other instances involving our private activities, we should avoid trading on our Bay Area News Group affiliation. It is the staffer's responsibility to make certain no lines are crossed; consult with the Managing Editor or appropriate senior editor if you have questions.

Within the framework of these guidelines, the goal of the ranking editors is to take a constructive rather than punitive approach to potential violations whenever appropriate. All incidents, however, will be need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

### **RELATIONSHIPS**

Employees shall not write, photograph, illustrate or make news judgments about anyone related to them by blood or marriage, or with whom they have a close personal relationship. This does not apply to first-person stories or stories in which the relationships are clearly spelled out.