



Statement of Editorial Principles & Operational Guidelines

The following Statement of Editorial Principles & Operational Guidelines informs the work and conduct of all those involved in the production and delivery of news and other content from the various media platforms of the OCM Group and stands as our public declaration of purpose and commitment to the daily pursuit of truth in serving the public's right to know.

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

One Caribbean Media cherishes the ideal of a Caribbean community governed by the principles of democracy, where the rights and freedoms of the individual exist in harmony with the quest for an enlightened society founded on justice, equity and respect for all.

To this end, we embrace as sacred the responsibility to serve the public's right to know through the relentless pursuit of truth by a journalism of the highest editorial and ethical standard.

The following principles guide our daily actions and inform the exercise of editorial judgment.

TRUTH & ACCURACY

Serving the public's right to know the truth is at the core of our mission to report every situation accurately, fully and in context.

ACCOUNTABILITY & TRANSPARENCY

The circle of trust between the public and us is made complete by our acceptance of the responsibility to be accountable for all our actions in the exercise of the freedoms granted to the institution of the media. Public inquiry and discussion about our work are

therefore embraced and encouraged in the interest of transparency in the editorial process.

TRUST & INDEPENDENCE

Every step of the process in which we gather and present information is governed by the requirement for trust, both in and out of our operations. Public confidence in our work relies on a clear and demonstrated commitment to the public interest above all other interests. In pursuit of this, we jealously guard the integrity and independence of the Editorial process.

CONFIDENTIALITY & PRIVACY

We hold the highest respect for the rights of those who are the subjects and objects of the news-gathering process, recognizing the protection of individual rights under the law as well as our responsibility to those who confide in us. We carry a particular responsibility for children, the most vulnerable among us.

OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

The OCM Statement of Principles are applied in our day-to-day activities through the following rules which guide the operations of our newsrooms and the actions of our staff:

GATHERING THE NEWS

ACCURACY

Credibility is our most critical asset and will be protected only by an unwavering commitment to accuracy and to getting it right the first time. The following guidelines are set in the interest of achieving the most accurate possible reporting of reality:

- All the facts relevant to the story must be based on first-hand sources where possible or on verifiable evidence.
- Where first-hand knowledge is not available, the facts should be verified by a source in a position to know.
- In matters involving allegations, the information should be verified by a minimum of two identifiable sources.
- Language must be clear and unambiguous with scrupulous avoidance of vague phrases that could leave room for inferences and imputations not supported by the facts.
- Due caution should be exercised against distorting the facts through the use of terms or tones that exaggerate the report of any situation.

- In published or broadcast reports, speculation that is not warranted by the facts should be avoided.
- All documents, video, audio and photos should be validated especially when supplied by sources with an interest in their public release.
- Observe extreme caution and double-check facts when using online reports from sites which are not among those regularly used by the Group; in every case sources must be cited.
- Staging or re-enactment of events for photos or video recording should be done only in exceptional circumstances and, in every case, must be identified as such.
- Digital alterations of photo, video and audio are to be firmly resisted. In the rare case that this is done, it must be clearly disclosed to the audience.

SOURCES

Sources and contacts are the lifeblood of journalism. Good, reliable sources give us the competitive edge and put us in the know in order that we may serve the public interest; bad, manipulative sources, on the other hand, poison the entire information system, sometimes with grave consequences for the entire society. To protect our work from the latter, we should observe the following:

- Always retain control of the editorial process and recognize the role of sources as just that- sources whose input is subject to the normal processes of verification and corroboration.
- We do not pay sources for stories nor make deals in exchange for access
- Press for on-the-record information in cases where the story relies on a single source.
- Anonymity may be granted to a source only if the information provided is otherwise verifiable. Opinion must be attributed to identified source.
- Never promise publication or broadcast since, ultimately, the final decision rests on an editorial judgment of how, when and if a story should be used.
- Sources are not allowed to vet or have access to reports ahead of release except in rare and unusual circumstances. Such access should be granted only if, in the judgment of the senior editor, it is necessary to ensure, for example, accurate reporting of technical terminology used by the source. In such a case, it should be made clear to the source that only corrections of errors will be acceptable changes.
- Sources, including the competition, should always be credited.

FAIRNESS

A reputation for fairness is essential to building and deepening the trust between us and the various audiences and sources with whom we engage every day. It is our responsibility therefore, to act in a manner that demonstrates that we have no axe to grind other than the public's right to know. We can achieve this by:

- Maintaining a clear separation between our personal opinions and the public interest that we serve by not mixing facts and comment.
- Being upfront in explaining to interviewees the purpose for which their input is being sought, except in the rare case where, in the opinion of the editor, the situation warrants withholding the full scope of the investigation.
- Making every effort to contact individuals who are the subject of allegations for their response before such allegations are published or broadcast. In cases where the person/s cannot be reached, the report should state the efforts that were made.
- Demonstrating a commitment to getting all sides of the story from credible sources and in cases where we have not been able to do so, stating why this was not possible.
- Being willing to grant the right of reply in cases where an individual or organization has good reason to believe that they have been negatively affected by our reporting without prior opportunity to respond.
- Avoiding references to a subject's race, sexual orientation, religion, gender, age or nationality where these are not relevant to the story..
- Demonstrating respect and civility to all who come to us with a report or story of any kind, even if in our ultimate judgment, the information is not considered news-worthy
- Being willing to be led by the news worthiness of stories, regardless of the social status of the individuals involved.
- Ethical conduct in our dealings with those we encounter in the process of gathering information (***See Standards of Behaviour***)

PRIVACY

While we would expect our training programmes to ensure that everyone involved in the news process is familiar with the various pieces of legislation that protect privacy, there are some simple guidelines that should assist in keeping us out of unnecessary litigation:

- We enter people's private lives with their agreement

- If we're asked to leave private property we must do so at once. Being with the police or any such authority does not give us the right to trespass on private property.
- The permission of all relevant parties is required for the recording of private conversations
- Secret recordings are acceptable only in cases where a significant public interest is at stake, and even then, must be done with the approval of the senior editor who will determine whether there is need for legal input in arriving at a decision.
- Relevant permissions should be sought prior to covering events that require special sensitivity.

CHILDREN

Children are the most vulnerable sector of our population. We accept extra responsibility for their welfare. Protection of their rights is a cornerstone of our commitment not to exploit them. While the permission of a parent or guardian will usually suffice for interviews and other reports involving children, we should nonetheless be vigilant on the children's behalf in cases where we suspect that the adults responsible for them may be party to their exploitation. In involving children in any part of our operations, we should be guided by the position that their welfare is of paramount concern:

- Children should not be identified, either by name or face, as witnesses to a crime
- Children should not be quoted in reports that might expose them to the risk of violence, abuse, ridicule or punishment in any form.
- In cases involving allegations of incest, the word "incest" should be avoided where the child victim might be identified.
- Extra editorial judgment should be exercised in the publications of details where a victim's identity might be adduced.
- If, in the course of pursuing a story, we suspect that a child may be at risk, within the family or not, the matter should be referred to the senior editor for consideration on whether a report should be filed with the appropriate protection authorities.
- Call-in shows should advise children to seek the consent of their parent or guardian before phoning in.
- Due caution should be exercised in interviewing and recording children in cases where permission has been granted by police, prison officials and other authority figures whose interest in publicity may supercede the best interest of the child. In such cases, the journalist should convey their concerns and confer with their editor.

- Where sensitive matters are to be discussed with children, a third party trusted by the child should be asked to sit in.
- In selecting links to and from our various websites, special care should be taken to protect children online.
- There should be strict observance of the television watershed in the interest of children viewers.

STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOUR

As professional journalists, we understand that the power of the media is not our personal power; it belongs to the people on whose behalf we gather information for distribution in various packaged forms in order that they may be kept abreast of the world around them. In doing so, we observe certain standards of behaviour.

- Information should be gathered within the framework of respect for the laws of the land. Editors will provide guidance in cases where public interest requires undercover reporting or any such investigative approach.
- All credentials issued for the purposes of gathering information, such as press passes, must be used only for the designated purpose and not for personal gain or for deceiving or misrepresenting ourselves to others.
- Whether on or off the job, OCM journalists are required to maintain the standards of behaviour associated with responsible journalism including fairness and respect for all, including themselves.

INTEGRITY & INDEPENDENCE

Our most valuable asset is integrity. It is the basis on which we build the public's trust and confidence in our work. We achieve this by an unrelenting commitment to the public interest above all other interests. The following are designed to protect the integrity and independence of the editorial process:

- It is the responsibility of everyone involved in the editorial process to exercise sound judgment in the public interest as the basis of all decisions regarding content.
- Under no circumstances should confidential information regarding any element of news and other content production be shared with any person who is not authorized to receive such.
- Strict procedures for the release of copies of broadcast content must be established and followed in such a way that a record of each such transaction can be viewed on demand.

- Except in special circumstances and subject to all relevant documentation, raw footage and other recordings that have not been broadcast should not be released to any outside party.
- Requests for copies of unaired or unpublished material by agencies of national security must, as a rule, be entertained. All such requests should, however, be forwarded to the publisher who might seek legal and other advice.
- It is the editor's responsibility to ensure a clear distinction between News content and advertising or sponsored content, including advertorials, in such a way as to ensure that members of the public are always clear about what is being presented to them. News staff should not be drafted into the production of advertorials or commercial content.
- Logos of advertisers and sponsors must conform to established guidelines regarding their display in relation to editorial content.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information that we gather in the course of our work often has significant implications for those who give us information as well as for those of us who acquire sensitive information. Mishandling of information by any person with access to confidential information, both internally and externally, could have serious consequences for our sources as well as our journalists. The following guidelines are designed to protect all parties.

- The protection of confidential sources should be treated as a matter of utmost priority with prompt action being taken against anyone found in breach.
- Any agreement to provide confidential cover may be terminated if the source breaks any part of the agreement or is found to be non-credible.
- In bringing visitors into our news spaces, due care should be taken to ensure the protection of professional conversations in the workplace. Any journalist who is concerned about the presence of such an individual is entitled to seek the assistance of the editor.
- Extra care must be taken to ensure that no evidence is left lying around, including electronic trails that might identify the identity of someone to whom anonymity has been promised.
- Details of colleagues' assignments and story progress should not be discussed with competitors and others who are not authorized to have such information.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Editorial integrity is a hard-won asset that is quickly eroded by compromises with other interests. The following are designed to protect the integrity of our output as well as those involved in the editorial process.

- No journalist should accept any favour, gifts or payment in exchange for coverage of any kind.
- Journalists may not accept freelance or other employment or compensation with any individual or organization whose operations are likely to be the focus of their coverage.
- Journalists may not provide public relations, media management or advisory services, whether paid or not, to companies or individuals. Exceptions might be non-profit, community groups. In every case, however, these relationships should be discussed with the Editor.
- Journalists should avoid being identified with lobby groups and causes apart from the cause of Press Freedom, Freedom of Expression and others that pose no risk of conflict of interest.
- Journalists should seek the written approval of management before accepting appointments to boards or committees of any organizations or agencies. Journalists who have an interest in a private company should submit a written declaration to the editor.
- Business and finance journalists must submit a written declaration of beneficial interests and, in areas of possible conflict of interest, should be prepared to put such interests in a blind trust.
- Entertainment reporters, especially, should take care to avoid any semblance of being part of a show promoter's PR operation.
- No reporter should seek out tickets or invitations to events to which they have not been assigned.
- All materials sent for review are the property of the company and should not be removed without documented approval.
- The costs involved in reviewing restaurants, movies and entertainment shows should be borne by the company in the interest of objective reporting.
- All-expense paid invitations to cover events or destinations are to be discouraged.
- Journalists must not be involved in any discussion regarding sponsorship.
- All journalists, especially political journalists, must take every precaution to ensure that their personal politics has no impact on their work. The imperative of impartiality requires that no journalist should be involved in the activities of any political party.
- Personal relationships between a journalist and a likely news source must be disclosed to the editor who will exercise judgment in deciding what action, if any, is warranted in protecting the integrity of the news operation and that of the journalist.
- Journalists should seek the editor's permission before submitting their work in competitions or accepting media awards.
- Journalists who are invited to participate as judges in competitions must seek formal approval from the editor.

- Journalists who are invited to participate in a public event organized by other media entities or other non-media organisations, should seek the written approval of the editor.

ACCOUNTABILITY

We accept the responsibility to be accountable for all our actions in the exercise of the freedoms given to us as part of the institution of the media.

There are several built-in mechanisms through which we can demonstrate our willingness to be accountable.

- As soon as we are alerted to errors in any of our work, and without necessarily waiting to be prompted by external parties, we must make the necessary corrections and clarifications. The relevant correction should also be made to archived material.
- Journalists are required to maintain all requisite notes and recordings relevant to all their output in a condition that can be produced, if necessary, before a court of law.
- Senior editors are encouraged to meet with members of the public who have a query or grievance related to content in order to determine what course of action is required.
- As members of the relevant Media Complaints Councils in the different Caribbean countries in which we operate, we commit ourselves to upholding the respective terms and conditions of those policies to which we have signed on.

TRANSPARENCY

Our approach in dealing with the public is to be open to inquiry and to encourage discussion through the following.

- We recognize the right of members of the public to query our performance and we acknowledge that the onus is on us to defend the choices we make, both in and out of court.
- We accept our responsibility to observe the laws, regulations and norms that guide our behaviour and operations.
- We strive to eliminate arbitrariness and to ensure that all our actions can stand public and legal scrutiny

FREELANCE & OTHER SPECIAL RELATIONSHIPS

- All freelancers contracted for the production of news and other content will be covered by all the terms outlined in this Statement of Editorial Principles and Operational Guidelines.