

# The International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC)

## Draft Community Radio Guidelines for IPDC approved community radio projects

The guidelines help decision makers and programme makers of community radio to navigate their way through difficult editorial issues so that distinctive and sometimes controversial issues can be made into programmes with the highest ethical and editorial standards. Those who wish to receive IPDC support for community radio are expected to develop and publish guidelines for editorial independence and community participation based on the under-mentioned code of practice.

### Community Radio – Code of Practice

The community broadcasters are only deemed to be “authentic” community services if their programmes are community-driven. In this regard programmes that are initiated, produced and broadcast by members of the community qualify as a community service.

Community radio broadcasting should play an increasingly important role as a forum of community expression and the primary means of access to the broadcasting system for diverse groups of people.

For this purpose, the performance of the community radio should be periodically (at least every three months of the first two years of the operation and agreed upon time periods thereafter ) subjected to a review by a representative community organization elected to this effect by the community members. The review should be based on the following practices guaranteeing the editorial independence of the radio station and community participation in the programmes it broadcasts.

### ***Journalistic values:***

#### **1. ACCURACY :**

The information should conform to reality and should not in any way be misleading or falsify the facts. This demands not only careful and thorough research but also a disciplined use of language and production techniques.

#### **2. INTEGRITY :**

The information is truthful, not distorted to justify a conclusion. Broadcasters do not take advantage of their power to present a personal bias.

#### **3. FAIRNESS :**

The information reports or reflects equitably the relevant facts and significant points of view; it deals fairly and ethically with persons, institutions, issues and events.

Thanks to the application of these principles, the optimum objectivity and balance that must characterize community radio broadcasts can be achieved.

#### **4. CREDIBILITY**

In an open society, credibility is an essential attribute of a journalistic organization.

The credibility of the organization and that of its journalists are interdependent, one flowing from the other.

Credibility is dependent not only on qualities such as accuracy and fairness in reporting and presentation, but also upon avoidance by both the organization and its journalists of associations or contacts which could reasonably give rise to perceptions of partiality. Any situation, which could cause legitimate apprehension that a journalist or organization is biased or under the influence of a pressure group - whether ideological, political, financial, social or cultural -, must be avoided.

In the engagement and assignment of persons working on information programs, the organization must be sensitive to their published views, their personal involvements, associations and backgrounds in order to avoid any perception of bias or proneness to undue influence in the execution of their professional responsibilities.

In order to maintain their own credibility and that of the community radio, on-air personnel, as well as those who edit, produce or manage radio programs, must avoid publicly identifying themselves in any way with partisan statements or actions on controversial matters.

#### **5. DIVERSITY**

##### **5.1 Diversity of subjects**

The community radio would fail to live up to its mandate if, in an attempt to avoid upsetting anyone or disturbing any institution, it undertook to limit the comprehensiveness of its reporting on contemporary society. Equally, it is important to examine and inform the public of both the positive aspects of our society and those which are being called into question; and of those trends or events which are important but that may not be spectacular.

An appropriate balance must be maintained in information programming between the national, regional and local needs. Programming cannot be limited to what the largest audience wants to know; it must include what the public is entitled and needs to know. This implies no disregard for expressed taste but recognition of the requirement for a source of comprehensive information.

##### **5.2 Diversity of opinions**

A journalistic organization, to achieve balance and fairness, should ensure that the widest possible range of views is expressed. Almost any opinion may contain a grain of truth that helps to illuminate the whole truth. However, proper account must also be taken of the weight to be given to an opinion and its significance or potential significance. The challenging of accepted orthodoxies should be reported but established views should also be clearly presented. Moreover, the range of views and the weight of opinion change and these dynamics of change must be reflected. Without these elements, programming becomes too simplistic to permit adequate comprehension of issues put before the public.

This aspect of the activities of community radio might at times lead to tensions with different elements of society. This should not inhibit the station, so long as it is carrying out this essential task of informing the public in accordance with established journalistic standards.

## **6. BALANCE**

Radio programs dealing with matters of public interest on which differing views are held must supplement the presentation of one point of view with an equitable treatment of other relevant points of view. Equitable in this context means fair and reasonable, taking into consideration the weight of opinion behind a point of view, as well as its significance or potential significance.

There are two sources of balance and fairness in information programming, one provided by the journalist and the other provided by the community radio as a journalistic organization.

Journalists will have opinions of their own, but they must not yield to bias or prejudice. For journalists to be professional, they do not have to be without opinions, but simply be aware of those opinions and make allowances for them, so that their reporting is, and appears to be, judicious and fair.

When an appropriate representative of one side of the story cannot be reached, the journalist or producer should make every effort to find someone who can represent that point of view and, if unable to do so, should announce the fact in a simple and direct manner.

On the other hand, the community radio, as a journalistic organization, must ensure that its programming is fair and balanced. Program balance should be achieved, where appropriate, within a single program or otherwise within an identifiable series of programs.

Balance is not to be confused with the concept of right of reply. The community radio must itself be responsible for determining when a significant imbalance has occurred, and what remedial action must be taken.

### **Ethical standards:**

#### **1. Factual Programmes.**

- i. A factual programme dealing with controversial public policy or matters of political or industrial controversy will meet its commitment to due impartiality if it is fair, accurate and maintains a proper respect for truth. If it chooses to test or report one side of a particular argument, it should ensure that opposing views are not misrepresented.

#### **2. News Programmes.**

- i. News should be presented with due accuracy and impartiality.
- ii. Reporting should be dispassionate, wide-ranging and well informed. In reporting matters of industrial or political controversy the main differing views should be given due weight in the period during which the controversy is active.
- iii. News programmes should offer listeners an intelligent and informed account of issues that enables them to form their own views.
- iv. A reporter of the station may express a professional, journalistic judgement but not a personal opinion.
- v. Continuing news and current affairs programs must present a balanced overall view of controversial matters, to avoid the appearance of promoting particular opinions or being manipulated into doing so by events. Journalists, editors and supervisors must be aware of the

necessity for balance in their ongoing presentation of controversial matters.

- vi. Such continuing news and current affairs programs, particularly magazine programs, are expected to present the general flow of ideas prevalent in our society. This will entail, at times, broadcasting the views of a single author, scientist, thinker, expert, artist or citizen, whose thoughts merit airing on their own account. In performing this role, those responsible for journalistic programming must avoid a cumulative bias or slant over a period of time and must be mindful of the radio stations' responsibility to present the widest possible range of ideas.

### **3. Personal view Programmes.**

- i. Single programs dealing with a major controversial issue should give adequate recognition to the range of opinion on the subject. Fairness must be the guiding principle in presentation, so as to allow the audience to make a judgement on the issue discussed based on the facts.
- ii. In exceptional circumstances, a program may be based on the personal view of an individual. When that occurs, the audience must be made aware of the personal character of the program. The personal view must be that of an individual with demonstrable expertise in the subject matter of the program.
- iii. The Community Radio must allow open access to the airwaves for a wide range of individuals or groups to offer a personal view or advance a critical arguments. These can contribute significantly to public understanding, especially when they bring forward unusual and rarely heard perspectives on topics that are well-known from orthodox viewpoints. Personal view programmes which deal with matters of public policy, or of political or industrial controversy, should entail special obligations.
- iv. The nature of a personal view programme should be clearly signalled to listeners in advance.
- v. Broadcasters should ensure that these programmes do not seriously misrepresent opposing viewpoints. There should be proper respect for factual accuracy.
- vi. Broadcasters must provide opportunities to respond to a programme, for example in a right to reply programme or in a pre-arranged discussion programme.

### **4. Series that present a particular perspective.**

- i. When a series is 'authored', i.e. it represents a body of thought, it should maintain proper respect for facts and truth and should not ignore opposing points of view.
- ii. A program series must not adopt an editorial position supporting one side or another on a major controversial question. Although individual programs

within the series may reflect a particular view, the series itself must give adequate consideration to differing views on such subjects.

## **5. Right of Reply**

- i. Where a programme reveals evidence of inequity or incompetence, or where a strong, damaging critique of an individual or institution is laid out, there is a presumption that those criticised be given a fair opportunity to respond.

## **6. Sensitivity to offence and outrage.**

- i. In aiming to record all pertinent opinions, programmes will sometimes need to report on or interview people whose views will cause serious offence to many. (?)
- ii. Questioning must be firm, and answers should be challenged robustly and repeatedly if necessary.

## **7. Non - Factual and arts Programmes.**

- i. Drama, Arts and Entertainment programmes - all these areas need to offer artists, writers, and entertainers generous scope for individual expression. Broadcasters have a responsibility to ensure that the Community Radio reflects the widest possible range of talent, especially regional talents.

## **8. Accuracy-**

- i. Radio must be accurate. Research for all programmes must be thorough. Broadcasters must be prepared to check, cross-check, and seek advice to ensure this. Whenever possible, information should be gathered first-hand through on the field reporting or, where that is not possible, by talking to those were present and who can be considered as reliable sources.
- ii. Accuracy is often more than a question of getting the facts right. All the relevant facts and information should be weighed to get to the truth of what is reported or described. If an issue is controversial, relevant opinions as well as facts may need to be carefully considered and evaluated.

## **9. Correcting Mistakes.**

- i. When a serious factual error does occur it is important to admit it clearly and frankly.
- ii. Inaccuracy may lead to complaints. Where an error is acknowledged, a timely correction may dissuade the aggrieved party from complaining.

## **10. Accurate Language**

- i. It is not sufficient to get facts right; one must also use language accurately. This means avoiding exaggeration and the use language

inadvertently so as to suggest value judgements, commitment or lack of objectivity.

## **11. Privacy.**

- i. The Community Radio should respect the privacy of individuals, recognising that any intrusions have to be justified by serving a greater good. The right to privacy is qualified by “the public interest.”
- ii. People are less entitled to privacy when protection of privacy means concealing matters which go against the public interest.
- iii. People are less entitled to privacy where their behaviour is criminal or seriously anti-social.
- iv. The right to privacy is much greater in a place such as a private home than it is in a public place.
- v. Private behaviour, correspondence and conversation should not be brought into the public domain unless there is a clear public interest involved. It is essential that we operate within a framework which respects people’s right to privacy, treats them fairly, yet allows us to investigate and establish matters which it is in the public interest to know about.

## **12. Private Lives and public issues.**

- i. Public figures are in a special position, but they retain their rights to a private life. The public should be given the facts that bear upon the ability or the suitability of public figures to run for or hold office, or to perform their duties, but there is no general entitlement to know about their private behaviour provided that it is legal and does not raise important wider issues.
- ii. Community Radio programmes should confine themselves to relevant facts and avoid gossip. The information broadcast should be important as well as true. If a person’s private life is the subject of a running story, the radio should report on it when there are significant developments and ignore it when there are not.

## **13. Door stepping.**

- i. This is a term used in broadcasting to designate those occasions on which a reporter confronts and records a potential interviewee without prior arrangement, either in public or occasionally on private property. People who are currently in the news must expect to be questioned and recorded by media.
- ii. In all cases door stepping should generally be a last resort. It needs to be approved in advance by the manager who should do so only if:
  - a. The investigation involves a crime or serious anti-social behaviour, and
  - b. The subject of the doorstep interview has failed to respond to a repeated request to be interviewed, refused

an interview on unreasonable grounds, or if they have a history of such failure or refusal.

#### **14. Taste and Decency-**

- i. The Community Radio is required not to broadcast programmes which “include anything which offends against good taste or decency or is likely to encourage or incite to crime, or offensive to public feeling”. The Community Radio seeks to apply this requirement to all its broadcasting.
- ii. All Community Radio output is characterised by the broadcasting of a large number of ‘live’ programmes and broadcasters must be aware of the possibility of contributors, phone-in guests and sometimes presenters themselves causing offence in matters of taste, decency or language, or even breaking the law. To minimise this risk, producers should [evaluate](#) any potential problems and brief participants before they go on air, particularly in phone-in programmes.
- iii. While live music and speech are normal features of radio programmes, songs which feature strong language or explicit content dealing with drugs, violence and sex are generally inappropriate.

#### **15. Conflicts of Interest.**

- i. The Community Radio’s listeners must be able to trust the integrity of Community programmes and services.
- ii. The outside activities of programme-makers must not improperly influence Community Programmes.
- iii. Individuals should seek advance approval from the manager for any proposed commitment that might conflict with programme responsibilities.

#### **16. News and current Affairs.**

- i. People who work on these programmes should have no outside interests or commitments which could damage the reputation of the Community Radio and its audience over issues of impartiality, fairness, and integrity.
- ii. Particular attention needs to be exercised over the outside interests of volunteer staff and presenters.

#### **17. Political activities.**

- i. Anyone is entitled to be a member of a political party or organisation. However, active political involvement and commitments may cause conflicts of interest for people involved in programme making, particularly programmes that deal with political or public policy issues.
- ii. When individuals are involved in programme making, active political involvement can give rise to questions of impartiality, not only in respect of a programme but also more generally in respect of Community Radio.

- iii. Individuals should inform the manager if they are engaged in political activities in order for the matter to be fully considered in the light of the guidance below.

There are three general considerations.

- a. The level of political involvement.
- b. The nature and level of the individual's job.
- c. The extent of involvement in programme making.

#### **18. Specific consideration that needs to be taken on broadcasters' involvements.**

- i. The level of the individual's political involvement at national and provincial level;
- ii. An individual publicly identified as a candidate or prospective candidate for the parliament or local authority election; regardless of whether the date of the election has been confirmed;
- iii. Holding office in a party or a political organisation;
- iv. Speaking in public on matters of political controversy and matters of controversial public policy in books, articles, leaflets and letters in the press to support or advance a factional line of thought.
- v. Canvassing on behalf of a political party or candidate for election.
- vi. The level of the programme responsibilities will be considered in determining whether a conflict of interest may occur. If the individual wishes to maintain his level of political activity, it may be necessary, in some circumstances, to transfer them to a less sensitive position in the station.
- vii. News and current affairs programmes are subject to the most stringent tests of impartiality.
- viii. Where individual staff has any input to the editorial content of a programme, the manager will consider carefully whether this is compatible with his/her political activity. The manager will consider the implications for individuals involved in presentation and who are or might become known to the public.
- ix. Anyone who intends to seek nomination as a candidate for an election, whether at national or local level, should notify the manager at the earliest opportunity and withdraw from their journalistic functions at least six months before the date of elections.

#### **19. Interviewing.**

The interviewer must inform the interviewee before the interview about the purpose for which it will be used. The interviewee must also be given some indication of the probable length of the interview to be included in the program, recognizing that this figure is no more than an



estimation, and that in some cases the interview may not be used at all. In using an interview, the station must conduct itself in accordance with the conditions agreed upon prior to the interview.

Interviews should be well mannered and courteous. They may be sharp, sceptical, informed and to the point - but not partial, discourteous or emotionally attached to one side of an argument. Interviewees should be given a fair chance to set out their full response to the questions.

1) Even - Handiness.

- i) Anyone expressing contentious views during an interview must be rigorously tested. People in power and those seeking it, or those who advocate or criticise policies, must be approached with a broad consistency of tone. When a testing interview becomes heated, the emotion should come from the interviewee, not from the interviewer.

2) Fair Dealing with interviewees

- i) It is important that interviewees understand why they are being invited for the interview, what subject they are going to be asked about, the context of the programme, and the sort of part they will play in it.

3) Tone and Tactics.

- i) Interviews should be searching and to the point, well mannered and courteous. They may be challenging but never aggressive, hectoring or rude, whatever the provocation.
- ii) When interviewing ordinary people, the tone and approach has to be appropriate. We need to make sure they are not talked down to, nor intimidated by brusque questioning.

4) Fairness to the interviewee and Dealing with Evasion.

- (a) Interviewees should be given a fair chance to set out their full response to the question. However, interviewers have increasingly to contend with interviewees who are skilled at filibustering, using an interview as a platform and avoiding its proper purpose. Such evasion should be exposed. This should be done coolly and politely - if necessary by repeating the question and explaining to the interviewee and to the listener why the previous answer did not address it.
- (b) When two or more people are individually interviewed for the same program or a series of programs, no one participant may be shown or allowed to hear the comments of the other(s), if such auditioning results in an unfair advantage to the person given this privilege.
- (c) Prospective interviewees will sometimes demand that written questions be submitted to them in advance. This is not permitted because the audience would be misled about the nature of the interview and the interviewer inhibited in conducting it.

Phone-out

The person called must be informed of the purpose of the interview and permission obtained from him before the interview is broadcast.

When phone-outs are for back-to-back interviews of parties to different sides of a dispute, the first interviewee must be informed of the presence of the second before the interview begins and, if warranted, offered the opportunity of a brief rebuttal. To broadcast all or part of a live or recorded telephone interview, one must have the consent of the interviewee. Consent must be given prior to broadcast, but not necessarily before the interview. It is prudent to record the consent. Consent is not required when a person telephones the station to participate in a broadcast.

(a) When the subject is a matter of public controversy, balance is mandatory.

## **20. Broadcasting During Elections.**

- i. There is no other area of broadcasting where the radio's commitment to impartiality is more closely scrutinised than in reporting election campaigns. The station should follow the guidelines issued by the National Election Commissioner/Election Commission.

## **21. Emergency situations:**

- i. Reporting in times of National Emergency and Military Action. In times of emergency or when a military action is underway, journalism may be constrained by questions of national security. Matters involving risk to and loss of life need handling with the utmost sensitivity to national mood and feeling.

## **21. PROTECTION OF INFORMATION SOURCES**

- a) The station strongly upholds the principle of freedom of information and considers the protection of a journalist's sources to be an important element of this principle.
- b) Information which should be made known to the public is sometimes only available through a confidential source. Off-the-record discussions with journalists, for example, are often held by public figures and others. If the confidentiality of sources were not respected as a matter of principle this would inhibit the free flow of information which is essential to the vitality of a democratic society.
- c) Information from a source who does not wish to be publicly identified may be used if the source is known to the journalist and has a prima facie credibility. However, to avoid the possibility of being manipulated to broadcast inaccurate or biased information, the journalist must carefully check the reliability of the source and must obtain corroborative evidence from other pertinent sources.
- d) The identity and bona fides of a confidential source must be made known, prior to broadcast, to at least one senior editorial supervisor in information programming. Disclosure of sources within the journalistic line of responsibility should not be confused with public disclosure of sources.
- e) These guidelines are a working document for Community programme teams to enable them to think their way through some of the more difficult dilemmas they may face. Risk-taking is and must remain an essential part of the creative process at Community Radios. What the guidelines can do is help broadcasters

make sensible calculations about those risks by learning on the experience of others who have been in similar situations.

This code of practice is agreed upon and published by the ..... community radio on .....