

RESEARCH STANDARDS AND PRACTICES

FROM THE INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIUM OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS

1. All calls and correspondence relating to an investigative project—incoming and outgoing—should be documented.
2. All information being developed for projects is considered proprietary and confidential and is not to be used in any other way whatsoever. (For example, information learned about a company cannot be used to make a shrewd stock investment.)
3. No employee shall ever make false representations to anyone about his or her identity or the identity of the organization.
4. No employee shall ever break the law in obtaining information for investigative projects. Strict adherence to the law and to commonly accepted, understood journalistic information-gathering techniques are absolutely required. We deplore in the strongest terms any deviation from this standard, and we will not be held responsible legally or financially for any such infractions.
5. No employee interviewing someone for information relevant to a project shall ever electronically record that person's comments without his or her prior permission. No electronic "eavesdropping" of any kind will ever be condoned.
6. We respect absolutely an individual's right to privacy. Information about someone is private life has no inherent relevance, only where there is a direct public-interest link to the investigation. We do not and will not utilize database material about, for example, health records or bank account balances.
7. All inquiries from the news media about an investigative project shall be referred to the executive director or project director.

INFORMATION QUALITY CONTROL

1. Before any study or project begins, the methodology and the editorial scope and approach will be discussed in detail and finalized with the project director and the executive director.
2. Generally, interviews with government and corporation officials, current and former will occur only after a sizable amount of documentation has been amassed. Thus, the interviewer is well informed and in a "verification mode."
3. Projects will not hinge solely or even largely upon information from unnamed, confidential sources. Intelligence-related projects might be the very rare exception to this rule.
4. Everyone mentioned prominently in an investigative project must be contacted for verification and comment. The issue of fairness and balance is absolutely critical. For those persons who choose not to respond to inquiries, formal letters will be sent to them seeking their cooperation. The subject will have a set period of time—no less than two full weeks—to make any factual corrections or other comments.
5. The executive director and project director will read each and every draft submitted by writers. Initial editing will be done along the lines of broad organization and structure, plus the key element of tone. All studies must have a neutral, professional, dispassionate tone. Through successive drafts and rewrites, along with other improvements, any sarcasm and colloquialisms will be excised.
6. All sections of an unusually controversial nature, in which some sort of provocative new information is contained, or in which a prominent public figure is being discussed, will be closely scrutinized by the executive director.

7. An experienced attorney under retainer will analyze every study to address potential legal and public issues of libel and fairness. This will occur near the end of the editing process.

8. The executive director and project director will decide when the copy sufficiently polished form to be sent to the contracted printer for the study. They will review the various typeset versions, including the last stage "blue-line" proofs. Also approved in this publishing process will be the layout design, the title and the title page, etc.

9. If after printing, an overlooked typographical or factual error is discovered, an errata slip or a handwritten correction will be included in every published study.