EDITORIAL POLICIES
Guidelines for ensuring the integrity and fairness of Maryland Public Television programming and coverage

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Maryland Public Television (MPT) is both a nonprofit corporation and an agency of the State of Maryland. As a noncommercial entity, MPT is authorized under license by the Federal Communications Commission to operate six full-power television transmitters across Maryland. MPT is owned and governed by the State and its purpose is to help meet the needs of and improve the quality of life for citizens of Maryland and beyond.

MPT is a member of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). It produces, acquires and distributes high-quality local, regional, and national programming. Its entertainment or educational content is designed to support MPT’s mission.

Along with traditional broadcast distribution, MPT is a multiplatform public media service provider of content delivered via the internet, on mobile devices, and through video-on-demand streaming.

What follows is a set of guidelines and principles that govern MPT’s practices in the creation, production and distribution of content. In light of today’s changing media consumption patterns and interactivity, MPT recognizes that new media demand a more complex system of content distribution. Thus, editorial principles that govern television programming decisions also apply to today’s new multiplatform environment. Irrespective of platform, MPT exercises diligence and discipline to maintain its reputation as a trusted and credible source of content across all media platforms. This is how we provide value to our community.

Principles that guide our editorial policies

While MPT supports and airs a schedule of PBS-provided national programs, it retains broad autonomy and independent editorial responsibility. Underpinning this responsibility are principles ensure that:

- The public interest is of the highest importance; it defines and directs all editorial decision-making.
- High-quality content is designed to be delivered across a variety of media platforms, reflecting the needs of Marylanders who choose to access content in varied ways. Irrespective of delivery method, MPT works to give citizens access to a full range of ideas, information, and perspectives.
• Editorial processes are driven by fairness, objectivity, and balance and are free of undue influence from either internal or external sources.

Context, roles, and responsibilities

MPT, its production partners, and PBS all play essential and distinct roles in the public television programming process. Their respective roles and responsibilities may differ depending on the context in which each party performs.

• PBS encourages and fosters editorial works, but it does not itself produce any program content.

• The final responsibility for the quality and integrity of its broadcast services rests with MPT, which has broad autonomy in deciding whether, how, and when to distribute PBS program offerings.

• The majority of content distributed by PBS and acquired by MPT is created by a varied group of producers who are primarily responsible for that content. Full editorial control is asserted by MPT for all locally originated content.

Editorial standards and practices

MPT takes seriously its commitment to adhere to the highest standards of quality and integrity by supporting an independent decision-making process which is responsive to the needs and interests of Maryland citizens. MPT strives for transparency at all times regarding its programming and funding decisions.

• Producers must exercise professional judgment to ensure the standards of fairness, accuracy, and objectivity are met. Every effort is made to present all relevant information and points of view as well as to present content in the proper context.

• MPT news and public affairs personnel adhere to the guidelines set forth by the Society of Professional Journalists which is considered the standard for credible news-gathering organizations.

• To preserve the editorial integrity of a program, no funder is part of the editorial process.

Funding standards and practices

MPT recognizes that sound financial management of a public broadcasting entity is crucial to its credibility. Therefore,

• editorial control of programming remains in the hands of the producer and is not delegated to a funder;
• funding arrangements do not create the perception that editorial control has been exercised by someone other than the producer or that a program has been inappropriately influenced by its funding source; and

• all funding activities are subject to guidelines provided by the Maryland State Ethics Commission.

Oversight

Within MPT’s organization are administrative and business units that provide oversight of these policies and management of editorial issues arising from content, events, funding arrangements, and outreach activities.

These individuals make available this publication of MPT editorial policies to assist individuals and groups in understanding and complying with our network’s guidelines.
Chapter 2 - Introduction to MPT editorial policies

These guidelines are intended as both an official and living document, subject to revision by Maryland Public Television on a periodic basis.

This document is the result of a review of the Code of Editorial Integrity for Local Public Media Organizations (2012); PBS Program Standards and Journalism Guidelines (1971, 1987, 2005); CPB viewership research studies (2004-2005); and best practices of other leading public media entities. This document clarifies and codifies the thought process that guides MPT’s editorial values and standards.

MPT corporate officers oversee separate groups that collectively provide oversight and management of editorial and production-related issues and decisions across all MPT operations. These are:

Content and Education divisions. Editorial discussions and decisions among professional staff occur daily within both the Content and Education divisions. Topics include program acquisitions, production scripts, rough cuts, interview texts, website design and text and structuring and negotiating deals and contracts. (Similar discussions occur within the Development Division as it addresses pledge programming, community outreach and station communications.) Daily operations of the Content and Education divisions include decision-making in concert with other units including Development, communications, production operations, legal, business affairs, and finance units.

Leadership team. This group meets weekly to address issues of broad concern across departments. Editorial matters are regularly discussed, particularly those that shape content, have significant financial impact, or have communications implications for the station. Local public affairs and news, including Public Square programming, are also discussed in this group.

Project Review Committee (PRC). This is a cross-departmental body whose members cast votes in order to “greenlight” or begin production of new projects. Voting is based upon both the editorial and financial case made by the project’s champion. Typically projects are brought to PRC from the Content, Education, or Development divisions.

New Initiatives Fund (NIF) Committee. This is a cross-departmental body whose members cast votes to “greenlight” new projects or initiatives that will receive funding from the New Initiatives Fund established in 2007. Voting is based upon both the editorial and financial case made by the project’s champion. Typically projects are brought to the committee from the Content, Education, or Development divisions.
**Red flag advisory group.** This group is convened on a quick-turnaround and/or on an as-needed basis. The group includes staff from the senior management, legal and communications areas. The group determines how highly controversial or “red flagged” programming should be handled on air and online. Meetings are recorded in note form, and notes are kept on file.
Chapter 3 - Guiding principles

The majority of MPT content is acquired from national distributors, including PBS, American Public Television (APT), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA), and others.

MPT produces the remainder of its content for local and national distribution on a variety of distribution platforms discussed earlier.

MPT has identified five principles that guide its content services. They are:

- Editorial integrity
- Content quality
- Content diversity
- Content localism
- Editorial approvals

Each of these principles is discussed below.

Editorial integrity

MPT’s reputation for quality reflects public trust in the integrity of MPT’s editorial processes. To maintain that trust, MPT is responsible for shielding its editorial process from political pressure or improper influence from content funders or other sources.

Through its professional staff and various internal committees, MPT provides daily checks and balances to ensure that the content it produces and distributes satisfy these guidelines. As stated in the Annotated Code of Maryland (24-206), MPT facilities and programs may not be used to: present biased or one-sided aspects of partisan politics; advocate or oppose any present or prospective political candidacy; or advocate or oppose any legislation currently being considered or prepared. Similarly, MPT may not be influenced by corporate sponsors. MPT does not accept corporate support from any source that would influence or give the appearance of influencing its content.

Content quality

In selecting or creating editorial works, MPT seeks to offer the highest quality content available. Editorial decisions require professional judgment calls on a production’s creativity, artistry, accuracy, balance, fairness, timeliness, innovation, boldness, thoroughness, credibility, and technical virtuosity.

Similar judgments are made about the content's impact, that is, its ability to stimulate, enlighten, educate, inform, challenge, entertain and amuse end-users.
Content diversity

To enhance our ability to serve our community’s needs, MPT strives to offer a wide choice of content. Such variety furthers the goals of civil society by enhancing people’s access to the full range of ideas, information, and viewpoints required to allow them to make informed judgments about current-day issues. Varied content also furthers MPT’s serving many different and discrete audiences.

The very diversity of MPT content providers and funders helps ensure a wide variety of program subjects and approaches, providing a bulwark against domination by any single point of view. Our network’s standards and practices of diversity ensure that MPT offers content that reflects the pluralism of its local communities, including, for example, appropriate representation of minorities.

Content localism

MPT’s editorial philosophy rests on the belief that the greatest potential of its public media platforms is realized when our network serves the needs of its local community where there are wide variations in local content needs and tastes.

MPT exercises its autonomy and independent editorial responsibility by: a) giving its audience a broad range of content offerings; b) providing end-users with timely, engaging information; c) providing perspectives that enable citizens to make informed judgments; and d) making MPT’s editorial processes actively responsive to community needs. MPT broadcasts roughly 200 hours of locally originated television and webcasts roughly 5,000 pages of new online content annually.

Editorial approvals

For its original productions, MPT regularly exercises full editorial approval and control over content. For some government agency, nonprofit co-productions and program acquisitions, MPT will seek editorial input and materials; however, MPT maintains final editorial control. One example of seeking editorial input is in educational content production wherein Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and others provide expertise and review content. PBS has determined that co-production partners must either be in the regular business of content creation, production or distribution. In cases of work-for-hire productions, MPT’s Content, Education and Special Projects units still maintain final editorial control.
Chapter 4 - Context, roles, and responsibilities

MPT, its production partners, and PBS all play essential and distinct roles in the public television programming process. PBS is charged by MPT and other public TV stations with the responsibility to review, select, schedule, promote, and distribute editorial works – and, on occasion to develop and fund them.

Although PBS is expected to encourage and otherwise foster the production of quality content, PBS does not itself produce any programs.

MPT role and responsibilities

As a public television licensee, MPT ensures that its broadcast, webcast, and mobile services fulfill its statutory obligations as a broadcaster and content producer/distributor. While other entities, including PBS, may assist MPT, final responsibility for the quality and integrity of its broadcast services rests with MPT. Thus, even though PBS or other distributors have accepted a program and made it available, MPT has sole discretion to decide whether, how, and when to distribute the program locally.

Although PBS strives to provide a balanced content offering, MPT may choose not to carry that service or programs in their entirety. MPT regularly makes different decisions about how best to schedule or supplement PBS’s programs. MPT ultimately is responsible for ensuring an appropriate balance of subject and viewpoint across all its content platforms and for complying with all applicable federal statutes and broadcasting regulations.

PBS role and responsibilities

While the national producer bears responsibility for editorial production decisions, PBS bears responsibility and discretion for deciding whether to accept and distribute the program with the imprimatur of the PBS logo as well as for deciding when to schedule and where to promote the program for national distribution. Before accepting a program, PBS evaluates the program to determine whether it meets its standards. Both PBS and MPT construct their overall programming schedules with a view toward ensuring, over time, a diversity of subjects, viewpoints, formats, techniques, and content sources.

Producers role and responsibilities

The majority of content distributed by PBS and acquired by MPT is produced by a diverse group that includes public television stations, independent institutions such as the Sesame Workshop, independent producers (ranging from individual filmmakers to major studios), foreign producers and broadcast organizations, and individuals or organizations not normally in the program production business.
Primary responsibility for the content that MPT acquires rests with the producer who creates the content and is in a position to control and approve all of its elements in consultation with MPT. MPT solely determines whether or not to distribute the material.

For locally originated MPT content, similarly high standards apply. Again, MPT retains full editorial approval and bears responsibility for editorial control. To ensure locally originated content meets the standards embodied in these guidelines, MPT and its content and production partners have a mutual obligation to communicate frequently during the production process. The goal of this liaison is to provide opportunities for early notice and to resolve problems. Thus, MPT has a responsibility to make these guidelines known to producers and partners and institutionally to adhere to these guidelines.
Chapter 5 - Editorial standards and practices

These guidelines represent a distillation of the most important standards and practices that have helped nonfiction producers in the past. They are not meant to be comprehensive, and so producers are encouraged to seek the advice or guidance of the executive producer or management supervisor when in doubt.

The guidelines apply to all Maryland Public Television productions.

Where the term "producer" is used, MPT means also to include reporters or other staff persons with day-to-day editorial responsibility for a program or program segment. The guidelines apply equally to those on staff and to those with whom MPT contracts to make a program. Where the term "executive producer" is used we mean to include any senior producer or project supervisor. These guidelines may be modified from time to time, and comments are always welcome.

Section A - Fairness

All of MPT's nonfiction programs rest on the expectation that the producers MPT hires and contracts with are interested in honest inquiry into the matter at hand and will approach the making of programs with an open mind.

Since publication of truthful, accurate information is the prime mission of our programs, it should be clear that willful misrepresentation or falsification of program content will be considered unprofessional conduct and will carry consequences.

In the pursuit of truthful information, the producer must be sensitive to issues of fairness if the program is to have credibility. Truth is an elusive combination of fact and opinion, of reason and experience. MPT asks for the viewer's trust. In turn, it promises that the subject matter and the people in the program will be treated fairly.

The intent to be fair is a strength, not a weakness. If the intent is seen as fair, whatever message the program carries becomes more salient. When program content appears to be unfair, it defeats itself. On a controversial subject, the ideal program is one whose tone is persuasive, not argumentative.

Specifically, fairness means that producers will:

• Approach stories with an open and skeptical mind and a determination, through extensive research, to acquaint themselves with a wide range of viewpoints.

• Try to keep personal bias and opinion from influencing their pursuit of a story.

• Carefully examine contrary information.
• Exercise care in checking the accuracy and credibility of all information they receive, especially as it may relate to accusations of wrongdoing.

• Give individuals or entities who are the subject of attack the opportunity to respond to the attack.

• Represent fairly the words and actions of the people portrayed.

• Inform individuals who are the subject of an investigative interview of the general areas of questioning in advance and, if important for accuracy, give those individuals an opportunity to check their records.

• Try to present the significant facts a viewer would need to understand what he or she is seeing, including appropriate information to frame the program.

• Always be prepared to assist in correcting errors.

When there are conflicting viewpoints or opinions on subjects treated within journalistic program, fairness does not require that equal time be accorded to conflicting opinions. However, it does require the acknowledgment and responsible depiction of conflicting opinions.

In matters of fairness there is one specific requirement: all producers must have a fact-checking procedure at the completion of the program in which every line of narration and sync and every picture is checked for the accuracy of any factual assertion. Producers must pay attention to the proper spelling of names and titles, correct dates, accurate translation of foreign language material, etc. They must be prepared to cite a source or sources for a fact asserted. Please note that assertion of facts by experts may be accepted without checking, but producers should review those assertions if any credible question arises about their accuracy. If an expert's assertion calls into question the character or competency of another person or entity or is otherwise possibly defamatory, then the assertion may not be accepted without verification. All factual assertions by non-expert interviewees must be checked.

Nothing in the fairness rules should be interpreted to prevent a producer from making a point-of-view or authored program. However, such a program must be identified and labeled as such. Such programs can be given great latitude as personal and artistic expressions so long as they are not inaccurate or defamatory.

**Section B - Funding a program**

Best practice dictates that producers should be distanced from potential funders to the greatest extent possible. (This does not apply to co-producers; see below.) The presentation of funding proposals should be the job of the executive producer and/or a Development Division representative and/or member of senior
management. However, input from producers for proposal purposes may be desirable, or a producer may be asked to do research and write a funding-related document.

Once a project is funded, producers should try to avoid contact with funder except for promotional purposes. Sometimes, however, projects come to MPT after independent producers have already had discussions with funders. In such cases, the producer is obligated to disclose to the executive producer the nature of those conversations and to keep the executive producer informed of any future ones.

The editorial integrity of a program demands that the funder not become a part of the editorial process. If it becomes necessary for a producer to interact with a funder at any time, it is appropriate to discuss the importance of the issue, the amount of research done, possible approaches to stories, and the producer's qualifications to make the documentary.

It is inappropriate for a producer to promise to a funder to include or exclude particular information or characters; it is inappropriate to promise to give more or less weight to any particular aspect of a program; and it is inappropriate to commit to a particular film or program architecture.

These guidelines above apply to funders and not to co-producers. Co-producers are other entities that may bring money, access to money, editorial input, personnel or other resources to a project. Whatever resources the co-producer brings, the entity should be compatible with MPT and have its own independent perspective toward the subject matter of the program. All co-production agreements must be approved by MPT.

If a producer has obtained partial funding for a program, he/she must disclose his/her sources as soon as possible so that the executive producer can determine if any of the sources pose conflicts under MPT and PBS guidelines.

More detailed information on funding a program and regarding funder spot content may be found at www.pbs.org/producers.

Section C - Research and filming

As a producer considers various techniques in researching a story, persuading sources to participate, and gathering information, MPT expects him/her to act in an honorable fashion. Although specific examples could not cover all the concerns here, the primary issue is one of personal integrity. A general question a producer might ask him/herself might be: If you had to tell a reporter how you got the story, how would it sound?
Consult on conflict of interest problems

Any producer who has a material interest or a financial, family, political, or other personal stake in a subject to be covered in his/her program must make that interest known to the executive producer. It is also the producer’s responsibility to monitor any interest of those he/she may hire to carry out the project. Also note that if the subject of the program involves MPT, the producer must disclose an institutional conflict of interest to the audience.

Where the matter under examination places the producer or other members of his/her team in possession of information that could lead to personal gain, especially in the case of insider knowledge of a publicly traded company, acting on that knowledge might be considered illegal and must be avoided.

Do not lobby or endorse candidates

Maryland Public Television staff producers engaged in creating content are bound by a rigorous prohibition against certain political activities. The specifics are outlined in the Maryland Public Television station ethics policy that is available from the Human Resources Department. Although the station policy cannot apply in all its details to independent producers, the principles underlying that policy will be applied during the period of time during which the independent is working by contract for MPT. Those principles are:

- Maryland Public Television programs cannot present biased or one-sided aspects of partisan politics, nor may they endorse or oppose particular political candidates, parties, or legislation. Coverage of legislation and elections is perfectly appropriate.

- Equal time requirements during election cycles may be applicable.

- When working on any politically controversial program, the producer should engage in no personal political activities, including donations or signing petitions, which would undermine his/her claim to be a trusted reporter, producer, or editor. Any prior donations must be disclosed to the executive producer. The general test here is whether a producer or the executive producer would feel uncomfortable if private beliefs or actions were made public in the context of one’s work for MPT.

- When working on any program for MPT, producers should not lobby for or against any specific piece of legislation and must never use their relationship with Maryland Public Television to promote or oppose specific pieces of legislation.

Do not accept gifts

As a general rule, the producer should pay his/her own way and be beholden to no one. Producers should avoid honoraria or gifts from groups that have an interest in how the subject of the program is treated. For MPT staff members, more detailed rules regarding
conflicts of interest, gifts, and outside work can be found in the MPT employee policies publication available from the Human Resources Department. However, to reduce production budgets, producers may negotiate deals for free or reduced airline, hotel, car rental, and other services in exchange for a "special thanks" credit. If it would appear that the entity providing the service has an interest in the subject matter of the film, the practice should be avoided.

**Do not plagiarize**

In the writing of program proposals, outlines and treatments, it is appropriate to rely on what has been published by others as long as proper citation is given. But if, before making the program, a producer anticipates substantial reliance on the work of others, it is customary to offer credit to them or their work. It is also equitable to pay the original author as a consultant to the project or even to buy the rights to the material.

Since these matters turn on many variables, a general guideline is not possible except that it is important that producers disclose, as soon as possible, any circumstances they are aware of in which third parties could raise claims of plagiarism. All arrangements with parties who have previously published material relied on or used in a program must be approved or reviewed by the executive producer.

**Obey the law**

The obligations of producers are generally not different from those of a citizen when it comes to obeying the law. It is particularly important that the producer not violate the rights of others in the pursuit of a story. Producers themselves should never take action that would facilitate or encourage the commission of a crime. Knowledge that a crime may occur which might endanger the person or property of others should be discussed with the executive producer, but if there is imminent danger of serious harm, it should be reported promptly to appropriate law enforcement officials.

Certain investigative techniques permit knowledge of a crime to be withheld from authorities (for example, when the producer is investigating the misconduct of a public official who would have knowledge of it if such a report were made). Also there are a few, very rare special cases (for instance, the practice of demonstrating lax law enforcement by violating the law) in which such violation of law might be journalistically permissible. The executive producer must approve any such case in advance. Any case in which the producer feels he/she may be in violation of law should be brought to the attention of the executive producer and the MPT Legal Department.
Consult before employing hidden cameras or listening devices

Depending on the circumstances, electronic listening and the use of hidden cameras and recording devices are illegal in a number of jurisdictions including Maryland and, therefore, should not be undertaken without the executive producer's approval and consultation with the MPT Assistant Attorney General. This guideline does not apply to situations where a telephone conversation is recorded with the consent of both parties for purposes of accuracy.

Avoid misrepresentation

In general, a person whose participation or cooperation in a documentary production is sought should know the identity of the producer and why the producer is seeking the person's involvement.

Material gathered under false pretenses may not carry the same implication of consent that otherwise applies to information freely given to a journalist. If a case arises that calls for a producer to hide who he/she is, it must be approved by the executive producer in advance of shooting unless producing under dangerous conditions does not permit such consultation.

In some cases it may be necessary for a producer to withhold his/her identity. Such cases are still exceptional and should be discussed in advance with the executive producer unless producing under dangerous conditions does not permit such consultation.

It is preferable in public affairs documentary reportage for access to a place or to a subject to be granted without any restriction or condition. In such circumstances, any question may be asked; none are rehearsed or identified beforehand; and no limit or condition is placed upon the uses made of the answers or materials given. It is reasonable in exchange for such unrestricted use to explain the purpose of the inquiry and even (to the extent known) the general context in which the particular interviewee will appear. In special circumstances, it may be desirable to provide questions ahead of time. For example, fairness may require that the subject of an investigative interview have the opportunity to check his/her records. Also it may be desirable and appropriate to prepare the interviewee ahead of time in nonpublic affairs documentaries where the aim is to elicit specific information. In no case, however, should a producer suggest to a participant that he/she would have the right to edit any material obtained by the producer.

With historical films, it is an accepted practice to give people an opportunity ahead of time to organize their notes and thoughts. It is the producer's responsibility to discern between an interviewee's refreshing memory and recreating the past. Simply put, the basic responsibility is not only to avoid manipulating an interview subject but also to avoid subjects' manipulating the filmmaking.
In some circumstances it may be necessary to agree to further conditions or restrictions to gain access, although agreement to such conditions should be the rare exception. Before conditions or restrictions on use are made a part of the contract for access, a producer must consult with the executive producer. In the rare case of a government agency’s conditioning access by a demand for review for national security purposes (for example, surrounding the release of classified material or protecting the security of troops), the producer must discuss this situation with the executive producer to determine MPT’s willingness to comply. In almost all cases, conditions and restrictions should be disclosed in the program.

**Do not pay for testimony**

It is Maryland Public Television's policy not to pay for interviews on its programs. Not only would payment establish a bad precedent, but it would jeopardize the credibility of any interviewee who was paid.

Reimbursement of expenses incurred by interviewees as a result of filming (reasonable hotel bills, travel, etc.) is permissible. Producers need not obtain approval for such payments. Payment for materials critical to the broadcast (for example, photos, diaries, letters) may also be made without violating MPT’s no-payment guideline. However, no payment may be made to induce a person to obtain such materials illegally.

Payment to interviewees for work income lost during filming may be allowed in cases of genuine hardship and, in certain exceptional cases, if approved in advance by the executive producer.

A consultant/expert may be paid to appear in a program but should normally be identified as a consultant at the time he/she appears in most public affairs programs. In non-public affairs programs, whatever other credits a consultant/expert receives, he/she must be identified as a consultant/expert somewhere in the program or in the credits. A consultant/expert must be treated as any other subject in a film. A consultant/expert must perform other work for the project in addition to his/her appearance.

**Consult before staging or re-creating events**

The use of re-creation and dramatized elements in public affairs programs can be effective devices, but there should be recognition of the fact that viewers might be confused by the presentation of something as real that is unreal. Therefore, whenever a re-enactment or staging is used, it must be labeled clearly and unmistakably as such or otherwise signaled in a clear way if there is a significant chance that the viewer will be confused. Public affairs programs in particular need to use these devices with great care.

Historical programs and other non-public affairs programs may find it necessary to use dramatic re-creations more often than is the case for public affairs programming. Often actors and sets will be employed. The responsibility here is to create an accurate vision
of the past, whether for an entire program or for smaller scenes within a program. Producers must discuss with the executive producer the extent and style of recreations, how much information may be conveyed by the dramatization, whether dialogue may be used, and from what sources it may be drawn. In instances where dialogue is created, academic experts must be consulted.

Section D - Editing and post-production

The guideline for editing is briefly stated: edit to compress, not distort. In no area of documentary production (or other edited programs) is there greater reliance on the honesty of the individual producer than in editing.

It should be the objective of the editing process to collect and order all significant facts in a manner that fairly portrays reality. Whether or not this objective has been achieved cannot be known simply from looking at the result. Thus, a producer might ask himself/herself, “Would I be able to defend a particular cut if others had access to the original materials?”

Use music/effects with care

The use of music and/or effects is an accepted practice. In public affairs programs, however, music that editorializes or over-dramatizes can detract from the film’s credibility. Effects and/or music in those programs should not be used if the impression created for the viewer would be distorted or inaccurate.

In public affairs programs, music/effects should be appropriate to and in keeping with the narrative line, and while this area is extremely subjective, the producer should guard against the temptation to use music/effects to communicate something that is not supported in the script.

In non-public affairs programs, music and effects may be used more loosely for dramatic effect or to entertain.

Consult on use of indecent or objectionable materials

In general, language and materials offensive to general taste or manners (for example, extreme violence, racial and other group-targeted epithets, strong language, nudity and sexually explicit material) should be avoided where inclusion is not necessary to a viewer’s understanding of the matter at hand.

When it is judged that the exclusion of such material would have the effect of significantly distorting an important reality, the executive producer must approve its inclusion, and the program must carry appropriate warnings to viewers. PBS must be notified in a timely fashion if warnings will appear before or during the program.
Identify sources

One cardinal responsibility of the producer is to present the significant facts. This means the producer must clearly identify those who speak on camera or who are invoked as authorities for statements of fact.

In such cases, identification must also include relevant information about the character of the source. By extension, any special interest the speaker or interviewer might have that could motivate his/her speaking should be made known in the program. For example, by narration or on-screen identification, one should note if the speaker has filed a lawsuit in the matter being discussed or works for an entity that has a political reputation or has written about science or history from a particular point of view.

Best practice dictates that there be at least two independent sources on the record (one might be a document) before one publishes controversial factual assertions. If that is not possible, publication may still be appropriate if the limitation to a single source is clearly revealed to the viewer. The executive producer must approve any such exception.

From time to time, particularly in public affairs programs, it may be necessary to conceal or keep confidential a source’s name or disguise a source’s voice. In such cases the name of and background information about the source must be disclosed to the executive producer and possibly to Maryland Public Television legal counsel.

Consider diversity in sources

Producers are free to exercise their editorial judgment as to which characters are best suited to push forward a story line and which sources are best able to present the information the program seeks to deliver. However, MPT encourages producers to consider diversity in race, ethnicity and gender as a positive value in choosing whom to present.

Use labels, warnings, and disclosures

Producers are encouraged to suggest the use of labels, warnings and disclosures to ensure that viewers understand what they are about to watch or are watching. These devices can put viewers on notice about strong material that they may wish to avoid; the devices can properly set up the context for a whole program (as in the case of a point-of-view film); and they can be useful in presenting critical information a viewer needs to allow him/her a judgment about what he/she is seeing. The devices should be explicit enough in the script or on screen or both so that the information can be absorbed easily.

Attribute all non-original materials when necessary

Normally all materials used within a program, including stock footage, home movies, stills, etc., but not actually produced by the producer of the program do not have to be labeled as to source. However, if knowing the source of the material and/or its date
would help a viewer better understand the communication, the producer should make the appropriate attribution at the time the material is seen.

**Do not alter still photos**

Photos used in public affairs programs should not be altered. Altering involves adding, subtracting or rearranging the elements in a photo, and this may not be done without disclosure to the viewer. Public affairs programs must be especially careful to do nothing that would jeopardize the credibility of the program. Producers should be able to defend their techniques in public.

However, some techniques commonly used with stills are not considered alterations. These include: camera moves, cropping, highlighting a portion of a photo, computer layering, etc. Producers should discuss these or others techniques with the executive producer if in doubt. In general, still photo techniques are considered directing techniques for editorial clarification and emphasis.

In non-public affairs programs, there may be some exceptions to the "do not alter" rule, but photos must never be altered to present an image that is not supported by the facts, and any alterations should be done only with the approval of the executive producer.

**Use computer-generated imaging (CGI) with care**

The power of the computer to alter and create images offers many opportunities to enhance all forms of communication. In the nonfiction world, however, there is danger that the computer can be used to create images and graphic effects that cross the boundary between creative license and misrepresentation. Misrepresentation can occur when images are presented as "real" when, in fact, they are artificial. If a viewer could reasonably believe the images created by CGI are real, then the technique should be avoided.

An exception to the above rule exists in certain historical programs in which CGI may be used to recreate scenes or locations that do not exist today. The executive producer must approve the use of such material. Disclosure to the viewer is recommended.

**Do not pre-screen for interested parties**

The broadcast or, if approved by Maryland Public Television, the pre-broadcast release of a program at a film festival or theater must be its first publication. Pre-screenings for reviewers and the showing of samplers and occasionally the whole program for publicity purposes, if approved by the executive producer, are established practices, but those are the only recognized exceptions to a firm rule that prohibits others -- and most especially participants and funders -- from seeing a program before its first publication.

Only members of the production team, the producing organization, PBS, and others who, at the invitation of the executive producer or the producer (after consulting with the
The executive producer can act as independent consultants, should be permitted to view rushes, rough cuts, or any segments of the film before completion. This rule does not preclude checking the accuracy of relevant chapters in a film by sharing it in print or orally with a participant. If the executive producer has agreed to the extremely rare case of a national security review, such review should be disclosed.

There is also a well-recognized but limited exception to this rule against prescreening for certain filmmakers who obtain access to intimate personal portraits. The executive producer should approve such exceptions in advance. The fact that participants reviewed the footage may have to be disclosed.

**Do not show outtakes or notes to outside parties**

It is vital that outtakes and notes not be shared with outside parties (for example, police, litigants, their lawyers, interested parties, critics) unless such sharing is compelled by legal action as determined by Maryland Public Television. However, the licensing of outtakes or sharing of research material with other broadcasters and journalists may be called for either by contract or mutual agreement. Whenever the question arises, it should be brought to the executive producer's attention.

**Prepare for legal review**

Producers should anticipate a legal as well as editorial review of their work. For MPT’s own purposes and not to relieve the independent producer of any contractual obligations, the Maryland Public Television Assistant Attorney General also will review the program at rough-cut. It is especially important that independent producers seek Maryland Public Television guidance before deciding not to include or to remove material on legal grounds.

Legal review may deal with the issue of "fair use" of copyrighted material. It is worth noting that there can never be a "fair use" issue if the material is obtained directly from the copyright holder as part of an agreement. A producer must obtain material from a third party and use the material in the appropriate context before he/she begins the process of assessing whether the use is a “fair” one. Producers must advise the appropriate legal counsel as early as possible if “fair use” claims are anticipated.

The legal review will also look closely at material with the potential for generating defamation and invasion of privacy claims. Any program intending to publish material accusing others of wrongdoing or improper activities will be held to rigorous scrutiny under these guidelines. Further legal matters may include: releases and rights clearances; FCC rules on indecency; and the special provision governing equal time in elections.

Finally, all producers should make themselves aware of the statutory prohibitions against payola and plughole.
Help with corrections and updating

After broadcast, producers are expected to bring to the attention of the executive producer immediately any errors that the producer becomes aware of and to help in making any necessary corrections. If the error involves a misstatement calling into question the character or reputation of an individual, company or product, then the producer must consult with the Maryland Public Television Assistant Attorney General before taking any steps to correct it and before responding to the complainant directly. Producers also may be called upon to provide information for purposes of updating a program that is going to be repeated. If substantial work becomes necessary to update a program, a producer would receive separate compensation for this task.

Help with web and DVD production

Producers are expected to work with a web producer or others in providing materials and ideas for production of a website or DVD, if one is being made, to accompany broadcast of the program. Web publication is subject to the guidelines set forth in this document and to a separate set of special guidelines written with the web in mind. Legally speaking, web publication is no different than broadcast close up publication. Therefore, if extended interviews are published or there is new reporting, it must be subjected to the same rigorous editorial process that applies to broadcast. The same standard applies to the production of a DVD.

Section E - Business and commercial guidelines

Maryland Public Television has a complex set of business practices that are usually covered in the specifics of contracts with independent producers and by long-standing patterns and practices within the station.

Producers should involve the executive producer in any issues that cannot be resolved in the normal course of the contracting process or whenever business relationships need to be defined. There are some matters, however, where business practices intersect with editorial concerns, and guidelines (which do not apply to “lifestyle” programs) on certain of those issues are enumerated below.

Co-producers and partners

Producers may bring or be asked to work with a co-producer. Whether a co-producer brings money, access to money, editorial input, personnel, or other resources to a project, final decision-making on content must rest with the producer and the executive producer for the MPT public television version of the program. The co-production credit carries with it the implication of an editorial role for the co-producer. This means that the co-producer must share a journalistic sensibility similar to that of MPT and that any funding received by the co-producer is subject to review by Maryland Public Television. Special note: It is
never appropriate to co-produce with an entity whose ideas and activities are the subject matter of the program unless it is a work-for-hire.

Sometimes the term “editorial partner” is used. The term connotes a significant editorial relationship. All editorial partners should have an independent stance toward the content. Thus, other publishers (including broadcasters, print, independent producers, and specialized data providers) are all viable editorial partners. No editorial partner can have editorial control over what Maryland Public Television finally publishes.

Producers may be asked to work on acquired programs. In these cases, the entity or producer bringing the project to MPT may have already exercised editorial judgment. Nonetheless, it is MPT’s responsibility to review the project's funding, to assess the editorial soundness of the program, to engage in a fact-checking process, and to require changes to or reversioning of the program to the extent necessary to meet MPT editorial standards.

Producers may be asked to work on programs that will be distributed other than by PBS. If this occurs, the executive producer will determine the extent to which these guidelines apply. It is assumed that the highest ethical standards and best journalistic practices will be maintained if the Maryland Public Television production brand name is used.

### Section F – Safe harbors and advisory notices

These guidelines require and provide for designated areas of MPT-owned and controlled distribution platforms to be set aside as “safe harbors” from controversial or sensitive content and/or strong language. While individual cases are taken as they arise, generally MPT kids and family-branded content platforms are restricted areas. Family primetime viewing hours between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m., seven days a week, also have restrictions and are subject to occasional “red flag” content reviews, prior to distribution.

Generally some combination of three “red flag” options is considered:

- placement of viewer advisory notice adjacent to the content
- distribution of alternate, pre-edited versions of the material if such versions are available from PBS (or other provider)
- re-scheduling of the content outside of the restricted area.

MPT primetime (after 10 p.m.) and overnight dayparts, seven days a week, may carry unrestricted material, but as a matter of policy, if content is judged to be too sensitive by MPT, these programs must also carry an adjacent viewer advisory notice or simply not be run.

To remain in touch with community sensibilities, these guidelines recommend that on a periodic basis a generic “viewer comments” solicitation message (with a toll-free
response mechanism) be scheduled adjacent to controversial “red flag” content. End-
user comments will be reviewed and archived on an on-going basis to inform future
action.

Similarly, MPT will monitor published findings from both PBS and CPB ombudsmen
offices as their work is made available online. MPT web-based platforms maintain
editorial safe harbors for children and family content. Web bulletin boards and chat
rooms are regularly monitored for objectionable content.

Section G – Editorial balance

Maryland Public Television seeks to present content that, over time, explores a broad
range of subjects from a variety of viewpoints, including:

- diversity and minority issues
- health and wellness issues
- environment and ecology issues
- education and learning issues
- government and public policy issues

Section H - Local news, public affairs, and political coverage

As a State of Maryland agency, MPT is in a unique position with regard to editorial and
political influence. MPT’s governing board is politically appointed, and MPT receives
significant funding from state taxpayers.

Members of MPT’s news and public affairs team believe that public enlightenment is the
forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to
further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of
events and issues. Conscientious journalists strive to serve the public with
thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's
credibility. To that end, MPT journalists should be honest, fair, and courageous in
gathering, reporting, and interpreting information.

Members of the MPT news team should adhere to the guidelines set forth by the
Society of Professional Journalists and recognized around the nation as standards for
all credible news gathering organizations. These guidelines are:

- Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid
  inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.
- Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond
to allegations of wrongdoing.
- Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as
  possible on sources’ reliability.
• Always question sources’ motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises.
• Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.
• Never distort the content of news photos or video. Image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible. Label montages and photo illustrations.
• Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.
• Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story.
• Never plagiarize.
• Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so.
• Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.
• Support the open exchange of views, even views one finds repugnant.
• Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.
• Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.
• Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.
• Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public’s business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection.
• Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
• Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity.
• Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
• Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.
• Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.
• Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.

Political debates

MPT has a history of serving the people of Maryland by organizing and producing political debates in high-profile races. As the only television broadcaster with a truly statewide reach, MPT is uniquely positioned to perform this service, and it is part of MPT’s commitment to help viewers make informed decisions as they participate in the political process.
In accordance with public television standards, MPT has earned public trust by shielding its editorial process from improper political pressure or influence from program funders or other sources. Editorial integrity is based on journalistic principles of fairness, objectivity, nonpartisanship, and community needs. These principles are particularly important with respect to MPT’s public affairs programming and debate coverage.

Applying these fundamental principles to debate coverage, MPT adheres to the following guidelines:

- The debate should serve the public interest. In attempting to provide a valuable, newsworthy program, MPT must balance the desire to present the broadest possible range of ideas, issues, and exposure to candidates while at the same time providing the most useful and meaningful information given limited time and resources.
- MPT will maintain editorial control of debates held in its studios and when held at a location under MPT’s control. In the instances when MPT does not have editorial control, MPT will work with trusted partners with a proven track record of serving the public interest.
- Whenever possible, MPT seeks to co-sponsor debates with the League of Women Voters and/or other civic or media organizations that can help secure candidates’ participation and provide additional credibility to the event.
- MPT is open to a variety of debate formats and often includes leading journalists on debate panels.
- Viewpoint-neutral criteria (that is, objective criteria not based on the candidate’s viewpoint or political beliefs) will be used for determining the inclusion of candidates in the debate. These criteria will be applied by MPT’s editorial staff in its good faith judgment in consultation with any co-sponsors of the debate and will be made in accordance with all applicable federal and state laws. Criteria include:
  - Eligibility – The candidate must have met all legal qualifications required by federal and state laws to appear on the ballot and be eligible for office.
  - Active campaign – A candidate must be actively campaigning for election in the jurisdiction that is at issue. For example, if the office is a statewide position, the candidate must be campaigning statewide. To meet the definition of an active campaigner, a candidate would need to establish a campaign headquarters with a paid and/or volunteer staff; generate public interest, such as being invited to speak at public gatherings and obtaining monetary contributions; and have a campaign that would be sufficiently newsworthy to warrant coverage by the media.
  - Significant candidacy – The candidate must demonstrate significant voter interest and support. Polls are one measure of voter interest. A candidate who receives at least 3% in a primary election and 10% in a general election in an established, reliable, nonpartisan poll will be considered a significant candidate. Voter interest may also be measured by votes cast for a candidate in a previous statewide or countywide elected office. Substantial media coverage, financial resources beyond the candidate’s own personal resources, sizable volunteer efforts, or large turnouts at campaign stops may be evidence of significant voter interest.
Maryland legislative caucuses

MPT may on occasion receive a request from one of Maryland’s legislative caucuses to produce an in-studio special event discussion or forum focused on a variety of timely, topical, and politically sensitive issues. MPT will offer its services and facilities to all legislative caucuses for such special events, which will be streamed on the caucuses’ own social media platform(s). MPT will act only as the producing entity for such events. Each legislative caucus will be solely responsible for the editorial content of the production.

Section I – Objectionable material

Important issues may sometimes require inclusion of controversial or sensitive material. In general, depictions of extreme violence, the use of strong language including racial epithets, or scenes involving nudity and/or sexually explicit material should be avoided unless it is necessary for a viewer’s understanding of the matter at hand.

When it is judged that the exclusion of such material would have the effect of significantly distorting an important reality, the executive producer of the program must approve its inclusion, and the program must carry appropriate warnings for the viewer. PBS or associated distributors will be notified of such warnings and where they will appear in the program.

FCC regulations as well as public television editorial standards and policies must also be considered when it comes to objectionable material. For more information about FCC regulations, visit https://www.fcc.gov/general/obscenity-indecency-and-profanity. For PBS standards, please see https://www.pbs.org/about/producing-pbs/editorial-standards.

Section J – Online and digital content

The content of MPT’s website (located at mpt.org or mpt.tv), its original digital content, and its social media content that are published will be held to the same editorial standards of the guidelines governing the noncommercial public media model set forth in this document as well as to a separate set of special guidelines written with the web in mind.

Original content on mpt.org

Original content may include summarizations of broadcasted subject matter, schedules, community service initiatives, or additional, in-depth information such as interview transcripts, online videos, and links to credible, high-quality related resources. The website also contains ways to support MPT in the form of membership and contributions, as well as links to an online store where public television-related materials may be purchased.
MPT also produces online content such as that appearing on Thinkport.org and television program-specific websites such as MotorWeek.org, among others. Every effort will be made to ensure that content is presented accurately, in context, and with high educational standards.

Other outreach and promotional tools located online, including MPT-related blogs, Facebook, Twitter, e-newsletters and other tools, will be used for publicity and community-building. They, too, follow the noncommercial public media model.

MPT is not responsible for comments posted to these sites by viewers; such comments do not reflect the opinions of MPT. MPT reserves the right to remove comments if it deems them offensive or inappropriate.

**Acquired and linked content on mpt.org**

MPT online also contains content created by and linked to outside sources. Every effort will be made to ensure that content is presented accurately, in context, and with high educational standards. Websites containing instructive content, editorials, analysis, commentary, and points of view will be held to the principles of factual accuracy. MPT has the right to remove links deemed offensive or inappropriate.

**Advertising links and content from sponsors on mpt.org**

MPT online contains banners and links to sponsors of the website and of MPT television productions. All advertising banners and links to underwriters are approved for taste and appropriateness for public media.

**Original content published through MPT Digital Studios**

MPT Digital Studios creates a wide variety of short subjects that are published on different social media platforms. MPT’s original digital content will be held to the same editorial standards of the guidelines governing the noncommercial public media model set forth in this document.

### Section K - Social media

Although all MPT employees are subject to the general MPT Social Media Policy outlined in the Employee Code of Ethics, editorial employees are subject to additional standards meant to protect the journalistic integrity of individual productions and MPT as a whole. These standards apply to activities on personal social media accounts and any official brand accounts that employees may manage. Many central tenets were adopted from social media policies from across the news industry.

Social media platforms provide MPT’s hosts, reporters, talent, and other editorial employees special opportunities to engage with audiences directly, publish and spread the word about our work, and identify and cultivate sources and story ideas. But just as
on other platforms, it is imperative that editorial employees be mindful that their behavior on social media may have an impact on the reputation of MPT and our journalism.

Each of the following standards is important, and all are informed by a basic principle: Employees should not post anything on social media that they wouldn’t say on air or online or that would violate MPT editorial standards, as it may undermine MPT’s credibility and the employee’s integrity as a journalist. For clarity, it is understood that social media is an evolving form. Given this mutable state, new practices and new challenges will arise. Employees should consult a senior editorial manager for help or guidance when unsure; these managers are responsible for ensuring that this policy is followed by staff members in their departments. Violations of these standards could lead to disciplinary action and/or notation on performance reviews.

Verify

- Employees should apply the same editorial judgment and standards that apply to other parts of their work. This principle applies to retweets and shares as well, especially in the event of breaking news. Employees should take steps to verify the legitimacy of a social account or profile that appears to belong to someone central to a story and must not assume that verification (a blue checkmark) means that the poster is in fact that individual.
- When using quotes, photos, or video from social networks, employees should attribute them -- ideally to the name, account, or platform where the material is found. When feasible, it is best practice to reach out and message the user to get more detailed information about the origin of that information or material.
- Just as in the case with other editorial work, employees must make efforts to vet photos and videos for accuracy and authenticity.

Interact responsibly

- Social media can be a powerful place to challenge others and elicit compelling and frank discussions, yet the conduct of editorial employees in these exchanges should continue to be guided by MPT editorial standards of transparency, accuracy and fairness. Interactions on social media should always be respectful. If a post or exchange becomes aggressive, it may be best not to respond. Editorial employees should inform their manager if they feel threatened by a post or exchange on social media.
- Different social media platforms, and communities on those platforms, have their own culture, etiquette and norms. Editorial employees should respect these informal rules, and understand how their behavior in these groups might be helpful or harmful to MPT’s reporting or programming. Employees should recognize that the presence of a reporter in a social media community or group might be considered intrusive, and conduct themselves accordingly.
Avoid advocacy

- MPT’s policy on political and advocacy activity, cited above and in the MPT Code of Ethics, extends to social media. Analysis and thoughtful scrutiny is encouraged, but advocating political views or editorializing — even interjecting some humor — can undermine your and our journalism and are not appropriate. The exception is the case of commentators and people whose job it is to express editorial opinions.
- Social media platforms blur the lines between our personal and professional selves. As an editorial employee of MPT, one must remember that every post or “like” is to some degree public and may have an impact on the organization. Be mindful that even participation in partisan social media groups — liking, friending, retweeting or giving an RSVP to an event — may be interpreted as an endorsement. However, this policy should not be interpreted as a ban on joining or following groups or individuals for reporting purposes. Employees should be mindful of patterns in whom they choose to “follow” on social media platforms; consider following a diverse range of voices and sources. Always consult with an editorial supervisor if there is any question about whether one’s behavior could be a violation of the policy.

Consider rights when posting

- When natively posting video, image, or audio content, proper branding and attribution should be applied. Consult with a manager and/or MPT Legal when necessary to confirm that you have the legal right to post that image, video, or other type of media. Just as you would when seeking to publish elsewhere, make efforts to ensure that you are dealing with the people who have the authority to give you permission.

Be transparent

- MPT editorial employees are encouraged to have accounts on social networks to enhance their reporting, build a following, and contribute to building a strong reputation for MPT as a news leader and trusted brand. If an employee uses a social media account for work in any way, he/she must identify themselves as an employee of MPT’s production or show, ideally in a bio or profile rather than a username. Use a personal image (never a brand logo) as a profile photo. If an employee is a commentator or someone who provides opinion as part of editorial work, this should be clear in any social media post.
- Employees must be honest about their intent when reporting. If as part of work, one is posting comments, tweeting, replying, or interacting in any way as a reporter, do your best to identify yourself and your work if one’s profile on that platform does not provide that information. In rare instances where there is a compelling reason to use a pseudonym or go undercover, approval from a senior MPT editorial officer is required.
- Whenever possible, add a qualifying comment to any retweets, reposts, or shares that might be perceived as advocacy or endorsing an opinion on a political or
controversial issue. This applies even if an employee’s profile says retweets do not signify endorsements. Many people who see tweets and/or retweets will never look at a Twitter bio.

Be accountable

- Social media can help you build your reputation as a leader in your field. But because social media is an extension of your professional identity, if handled poorly, it can have negative repercussions just as easily as positive ones. Erroneous posts about stories, sources, programming, one’s reporting, or other posts that have the potential to harm the brand of your production or MPT should be corrected quickly and transparently in a fashion that represents the overall intent of MPT editorial guidelines. This applies to MPT-related tweets or posts on personal accounts as well. Editorial employees should consult their senior editorial manager when they receive new information that indicates they have made a mistake or sent out false information to determine the best way to address the situation.

- If one is ever in doubt about a post or interaction, enlist a second pair of eyes, whether it be those of a senior editorial leader or your direct manager.

Section L - Public service announcements (PSAs)

As a state-licensed, public television station, MPT provides a significant public service to viewers throughout Maryland and surrounding states through its public affairs and other local programming.

Due to limited airtime, MPT does not accept unpaid public service announcements (PSAs). MPT does accept, however, underwriting announcements that support programming on MPT.

These underwriting announcements must meet MPT and FCC editorial and legal standards. To the extent certain underwriting announcements appear to be in the form of a PSA, MPT will consider accepting those spots if they meet MPT and FCC editorial and legal standards. Specifically, a proposed announcement must not “express the views of any person with respect to any matter of public importance or interest,” as set forth in Chapter 399B of the Communications Act.

MPT will make its own determination as to what is considered a “matter of public importance or interest," but in no event will MPT accept any messages that involve partisan politics, advocacy issues, or controversial topics.

Announcements from governmental entities fall outside of the definition in Chapter 399B and as such are acceptable. Announcements from other sources, including nonprofit organizations or for-profit entities, will be considered on a case-by-case basis and only on the condition that they meet MPT and FCC editorial and legal standards.
Chapter 6 - Funding standards and practices

Although this document refers generally to programs in the singular, these policies apply equally to series of programs.

As a PBS member, MPT subscribes to the PBS funding standards and practices as applied to local, regional, and national programs and to content destined to be broadcast over MPT platforms and/or created by MPT.

Section A - Policy base

The PBS and MPT program funding standards and practices rest on three fundamental principles:

- Public television is a major participant in the great tradition of a free and independent American press. Therefore, public television must protect its journalistic integrity, and it must reinforce the accurate perception that it is a free and independent institution.

- Public television’s nonprofit, noncommercial status contributes to its independence. Public television also enjoys certain financial and other benefits by virtue of its noncommercial, nonprofit status. Therefore, its noncommercial character must be preserved.

- The diversity of program funding sources is a key element in the preservation of a free and independent public television system. Therefore, these guidelines should encourage national program underwriting from all corners of the public and private sector.

Section B - Policy objectives

Based on these fundamental principles, PBS and MPT have developed guidelines for the acceptance of program funding from third parties. These guidelines are intended to ensure:

- that editorial control of programming remains in the hands of the producer;
- that funding arrangements will not create the perception that editorial control had been exercised by someone other than the producer or that the program has been inappropriately influenced by its funding sources; and
- that the noncommercial character of public broadcasting is protected and preserved.
Section C - Policy application

- **By PBS:** These program funding policies are applied to the funding arrangements and on-air credits for programs intended for distribution by the Public Broadcasting Service (as distinguished from programs produced or acquired by individual public television stations for local or regional use).

  ✓ For the purposes of these guidelines, a program "funder" or "underwriter" or "grantor" is a third party that has voluntarily contributed cash (or substantial in-kind services) to finance, in whole or in part, the production or acquisition of a PBS program. The third party may not exercise and has not exercised any inappropriate influence over the content of the program it has funded.

  ✓ Entities that are normally engaged in the production of television programs (such as public television stations, commercial production companies and foreign broadcasters such as the BBC) and that finance their own productions, in whole or in part, are not regarded as underwriters and are not subject to these guidelines. These parties are regarded as "producers" or "co-producers" who are solely responsible for the content of the programs they produce and who are subject to separate PBS policies.

- **By MPT as a PBS member station:** The PBS Board of Directors strongly encourages all PBS member stations to adopt and implement local underwriting guidelines that are consistent with its national guidelines. Nevertheless, producers and funders should be aware that individual judgments may differ in a given situation, even when the same policies are being administered, and that individual public television licensees may administer local program underwriting policies that vary from these policies.

Section D - General principles for determining the acceptability of local, regional, and national funding

There is a three-test process for determining the acceptability of proposed program funding arrangements. If the funding arrangement is determined to be acceptable, a separate evaluation of the proposed on-air funding credit will then take place. Three tests are applied to every proposed funding arrangement in order to determine its acceptability:

1. **Editorial control test:** Has the underwriter exercised editorial control? Could it?

2. **Perception test:** Might the public perceive that the underwriter has exercised editorial control?
3. **Commercialism test:** Might the public conclude the program is on public television principally because it promotes the underwriter's products, services, or other business interests?

Detailed elaborations of the three tests are available on pbs.org under the heading “Producing for PBS, Funding Standards and Practices.”
Chapter 7 - Conclusion

The MPT guidelines set forth above embody some of the basic principles that inform MPT’s judgments about program quality and integrity.

For any given program, however, considerations other than those identified above may be relevant. Judgments about program quality, integrity, and diversity might turn upon a host of non-editorial considerations.

Ultimately, the decision to accept or reject the distribution and broadcast of content must reflect a professional judgment whether the content satisfies overall MPT standards of quality, integrity, and diversity. MPT may reject and withhold its participation in, endorsement of, or logo placement on any content that fails to do so.