Public Television Affinity Group Coalition

February 6, 2014

The Public Media Code of Integrity: Campaign for the Code

The editorial independence of public media's content creators is essential to our public service. So is the public's trust in our integrity and accountability.

Since 2008, the Station Resource Group and our colleagues in public television's Affinity Group Coalition have worked to strengthen public media's independence, trust, and integrity through a wide-ranging initiative promoting principles, policies, and practices of editorial and organizational integrity. Our efforts have included

- Forming working groups of public media professionals to wrestle with tough issues surrounding content creation, fundraising, governance, and expectations of our employees, among other topics, and make recommendations to their colleagues.
- Convening a roundtable of leading thinkers in journalism ethics and nonprofit standards, along with public radio and television leaders, to address how best to build a culture of integrity throughout our field.
- Drafting an extensive set of guidelines that local public media organizations might use for their own organizations.
- Publishing a succinct, "top line" *Public Media Code of Integrity* intended for the widest possible adoption across public media.

The most recent phase of this work has been a direct call to public television and public radio stations across the system to adopt the *Public Media Code of Integrity* or self-developed Codes of a similar nature. We asked stations to post the *Code* on their own sites or link to it at www.CodeOfIntegrty.org. This broad call to action is premised on two factors:

- Embracing a key set of principles is an <u>important first step</u> toward developing more detailed, organization-specific policies and practices.
- Widely <u>shared standards have more power and authority</u> in times of challenge and controversy.

This report reviews our campaign, related work, and the current state of play in the field.

A Campaign for Action

We began the campaign by asking the leadership of 20 public media membership, service, and affinity organizations to adopt and promote the *Public Media Code of Integrity* developed by the Editorial Integrity Project Steering Committee in July. Some, such as Eastern Region Public Media http://erpm.org/code-of-integrity/, published the *Code* on their own website. Others signaled their support through listservs and newsletters or at conferences and meetings of their members. Every group we approached joined the effort in some fashion.

We followed with extensive outreach to top station executives. We retained the team at Livingston Associates, with their wide contacts throughout public radio and public television, to help us directly contact all CPB-supported public television and public radio stations with individualized emails, follow-up correspondence, and phone calls.

The results of these efforts were encouraging. We learned:

– There is broad awareness of the work of the Editorial Integrity Project in the public broadcasting community.
– When the personal contact process is successfully completed, the response is overwhelmingly positive. Of the 342 organizations with which we were able to complete a one-on-one contact, 312 adopted the *Code* or started an internal station process that will likely lead to adoption of the *Code* or a similar document.
– Focused outreach was crucial. While some organizations had initiated their own internal examination of editorial integrity issues based on our project's earlier work, it was the combination of endorsements from national and regional organizations and one-on-one contacts that led to widespread action.

We were also reminded of the diversity of public television and public radio – organizations of very different capacities, pursuing many different roles in their communities.

So how have we done so far?

Tallying the Results

Our focus is 492 organizations that operate some 576 stations that qualify for CPB's support through the Community Service Grant program. The two numbers reflect the fact that some organizations operate more than one CPB-supported station, most typically a public radio and a public television station.

Here's where we stand:

Licensees	Grantee stations	Status
177	229	Report that they have adopted the *Public Media Code of Integrity* or a similar statement developed by their organization.
122	149	Report that they are likely to adopt the *Code* or a similar document pending further review and action, such as by a board of directors or licensee official.
30	32	Report that they have not adopted the *Code* and that they are unlikely to do so.
150	169	Did not respond to any of our email messages of phone calls.

We also tracked organizations' status by type of licensee as follows:

Type	Yes	Likely	No	No response	Total
Radio	101	84	23	104	312
Television	36	18	5	29	88
Radio/TV	40	20	2	17	79
Total	177	122	30	150	479

We recently developed "badges" that stations and others can place on their web sites to highlight their adoption of the *Code of Integrity* and use as a linking icon to the *Code* itself. We will distribute these icons in the next few weeks.

Resources on the Web

Our project website, http://pmintegrity.org, continues to serve as a resource for public media professionals and includes a wide array of materials, reports, and links. The site features the newly crafted *Public Media Code of Integrity* and new examples of more extensive guidelines and policies recently adopted by stations across the country (see the "New Guidelines" section).

The site generates a steady stream of traffic – over 38,700 page views over the second half of 2013.

> Resource documents continue to be the principal attraction. Resource documents include papers on journalism ethics and editorial integrity, reports from project working groups, and sample materials from national and local public media organizations.

> The site now shows up in web searches for terms like "journalism ethics," "journalism codes," and "media ethics."

> Visitors downloaded core project documents, such as the *Code of Editorial Integrity for Local Public Media Organizations*, several hundred times over the past seven months.

> Most visitors come to pmintegrity.org via search or by entering the URL directly. There is no referring site that accounts for a significant portion of traffic.

In September we launched a second, public-facing site that simply presents the *Public Media Code of Integrity*. This site, www.CodeOfIntegrity.org, is designed to serve as a destination for links on stations' web pages. Below are summary analytics for this site over the last months of 2013.
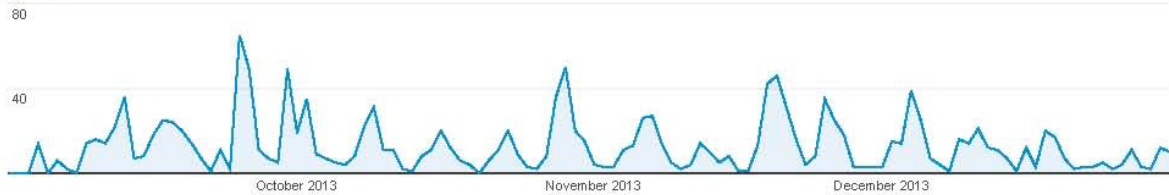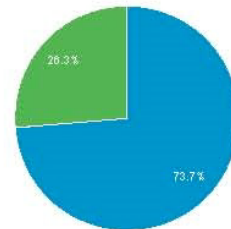
Should the Work Continue?

It is critical for public media to be associated by the communities we serve with the highest standards of organizational integrity and transparency. Over the last several years we have made significant progress in public media's understanding and embrace of principles, policies, and practices for editorial and organizational integrity. There is productive work that is still ahead. Here are some thoughts:

Continue the C*ode* adoption campaign. One-third of the licensees supported by CPB do not currently associate their organization with the *Public Media Code of Integrity* or have a similar document – at least as far as we know.

We can make significantly more progress on adoption – assuring the "likelies" get to "yes," continuing to seek contact with those with whom we have not spoken directly, and even turning around a few of the "no" stations . A continuing campaign would build on both the work and recommendations of the project Working Group that first outlined the need for such an initiative and the lessons learned these past few months.

Support station efforts to go deeper. We are acutely aware of the relatively small number of organizations that have deeply engaged in the development of more extensive policies and practices. Our site has publicized some of these efforts. We need additional efforts at this level.

Experience to date indicates that bringing principles of integrity fully into station culture is a long and heavy lift. There are several ways in which stations might be supported, including:

– Demonstration projects in which varied local organizations work through development of policies and guidelines and illustrate solutions for different kinds of licensees and services.
– Group learning efforts in which several similarly-situated stations work together toward the development of policies and practices for their stations.
– Mentoring and consultation, in which station leaders and others who have experience with developing materials of this sort are made available to assist stations in planning and executing their own process.

Telling the story publicly. Work toward a more unified, constructive, and functional communications approach when integrity issues come into the public eye. These situations most often involve major programs, larger producers, and networks, but typically affect all of public media. Using the roundtable model employed earlier in this project, we could bring together front-line executives with some experts in ethics and communications.