



Media Standards: A Model for Ethics, Good Governance and Transparency

Across the world robust and vibrant media communities work at a cracking pace. On all platforms of journalism media compete fiercely for market and audience share.

However, many people, including those inside media, worry that in this overheated atmosphere standards of journalism and media governance are put under strain and nowhere is this more evident than in the Western Balkans where countries have been at the forefront of conflict and the struggle for human rights and democracy.

The greatest challenge in the digital age is developing structures for internal organization of media that respect basic standards of editorial independence, good governance and transparency.

How can media build a culture of professionalism that will be an inspiration for responsible communications across the media landscape and beyond, into the wider public information sphere?

The Ethical Journalism Network, supported by leading editors, media owners and journalists from across the world has developed a simple tool that can help media monitor their own performance and also help develop ways of improving public trust and market confidence in their brand.

The following provides a basic structure for an Internal Standards Report for media. This is a form of internal auditing but one that is developed and implemented by the media house itself.

The report begins with a statement from the President or Chief Executive Officer on the values of the organisation. It then provides a brief analysis of the company's journalism and its role as a provider of public information, and it continues with detailed review of management and working practice.

The headings set out here are guidelines and may be amended as needed to suit particular local conditions, but the objective is to provide an accessible and coherent picture of how the company works, its aims and objectives and its vision for the future.

Section One: Our Mission

1. Company commitment to good governance and ethical standards
 - a) Mission statement
 - b) codes of conduct applying to journalists, all staff and editorial sections
 - c) governance rules (transparency, protection of editorial independence)
 - d) engagement with external regulators (press council, etc)
 - e) Recognition and reward for quality work (prizes, etc)
 - f) Promoting integrity through co-operation between different sections of the company (commercial, marketing and editorial)

2. How much journalism we have produced
 - a) Numbers of editorial columns, contributions from external sources (commissioned and uncommissioned), and numbers of contributors on all platforms (including online sections),
 - b) Examples of accountability journalism – scrutiny of business, politics, sports cultural life, etc.
 - c) Examples of issues raised and debates on important topics

3. How company protects editorial independence
 - a) Separation of commercial activities and editorial activities
 - b) Independence of the editor in chief : statement of editor on challenges and opportunities
 - c) Obligation of journalists to respect ethical codes

4. How Company deals with complaints and concerns of audience
 - a) Internal systems for dealing with complaints
 - b) Number of legitimate complaints received internally. How many resolved amicably, how many legal cases, how many complaints to the press council or industry regulator? How many noteworthy interactions with the audience and public?
 - c) External systems for dealing with complaints (press council, etc.)
 - d) Actions for engaging with the audience and readers

Section Two: Who we are and how we work

5. Management and ownership of the company
 - a) Status, name and address of the company, its range of activities
 - b) Board of Directors
 - c) Structure of management
 - d) Financial holdings of the company and those of its owners
 - e) Rules of internal governance
 - f) Report on company actions to combat corruption and actions taken in response to incidents of corruption.
 - g) Income received from state sources (advertising, grants, etc.)
 - h) Details of membership and participation in groups such as industry associations or national/international advocacy
 - i) The political stances of the company, if any.

6. Information on economic performance

- a) Circulation figures and audience reach
- b) Details of the company's financial status and reports as provided to national authorities as required by law.
- c) A commentary on financial trends and market conditions.

7. Industrial relations, labour standards and training activity

- a) Respect for national and international labour standards including trade union recognition, collective bargaining and gender equality
- b) What we have done to improve journalistic skills and other training for staff
- c) Numbers of full time, part-time and freelance staff
- d) Actions to promote diversity in staff employment

8. Safety and Protection of Journalists and Media Staff

- a) Provision of training and awareness-raising for reporting in danger zones
- b) First aid training
- c) Availability of medical insurance and life insurance including coverage for emergency evacuations
- d) Co-operation with industry initiatives to improve safety

Section Three: Our vision of the Future

9. Company objectives and targets

- a) Set out targets – editorially and commercially – for the company
- b) Assess successes and failures
- c) Highlight specific projects and programmes

10. Industry trends

- a) Challenges and risks in the next year
- b) Opportunities and potential for development

Section Four: Using the Report

Once completed this report can be used to promote the company's brand of trusted journalism.

The company may decide to use it to

- a) establish benchmarks for periodic reviews of ethical and governance capacity;
- b) to set targets for improving performance; or
- c) to use as a marketing tool to encourage advertising, commercial confidence and public trust.

A Checklist for Key Report Information

1. EDITORIAL PERFORMANCE:

Provide as many relevant facts and figures as possible and focus on work that has enhanced the role of ethical journalism.

2. EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE:

How does company ensure the right of editorial staff to work ethically and according to conscience, including

- Obligations to respect an editorial code of conduct (is this set out in work contracts, for instance?)
- The appointment and independence of the editor in chief
- Systems for monitoring journalism and correcting errors
- Structures for setting out editorial policy and dealing with internal breaches of codes and guidelines.
- Policy regarding use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook

3. ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE:

Set out economic trends and challenges with as much transparency as possible on revenues and expenditures as well as income streams from state sources.

4. EMPLOYMENT:

Provide information on your workforce by employment type, employment contract, and region, broken down by gender and nationality. Key elements of collective bargaining agreements covering staff labour rights.

5. HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Set out actions by company to protect journalists and media staff (and freelancers) including

- Provision of training and security protection.
- Provision of health and life insurance to vulnerable staff members.
- Other education, training, counseling, prevention, and risk-control actions covering serious diseases, stress related conditions and physical attacks.
- Special measures to support women staff.
- Health and safety topics covered in formal agreements with trade unions.
- Engagement with safety activities at national and international level including International News Safety Institute.

6. TRAINING AND EDUCATION:

Set out company provision of training including

- Training provided for employees by employee category.
- Programmes for skills management and lifelong learning that support the workforce and assist them in managing career endings.
- How workers receive performance and career development reviews, by gender.

7. DIVERSITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES:

Set out the company's performance in composition of governance bodies and breakdown of employees per employee category according to gender, age group, minority group membership, nationality and other indicators of diversity.

8. EQUAL PAY FOR WOMEN AND MEN:

Provide information on the ratio of basic salary and remuneration of women to men by employee category, by significant locations of operation.

9. HUMAN RIGHTS:

Report on the company's respect for national and international standards and how these are applied, for instance, limits of rights of staff related to their work (for instance, use of social networks and political reporting) and covering:

- Freedom of expression
- Portrayal related to Human Rights, for instance, coverage of minorities
- Cultural Rights
- Intellectual Property
- Protection of Privacy
- Corruption and lobbying
- Audience Interaction
- Advertisement
- Media Literacy

Set out agreements and contracts where there are references to human rights concerns (as set out above) as well as employee training on policies and procedures concerning aspects of human rights to raise awareness of company policy as well as national law on these questions. Report on the number of incidents of discrimination and corrective actions taken.

10. FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING:

Report on company recognition of the right to exercise freedom of association and collective bargaining and actions taken by company in line with its legal obligations. Report on number of internal grievances related to discrimination or other social and political rights of employees. How they were addressed and resolved through formal grievance mechanisms.

11. PUBLIC POLICY:

Set out public policy positions and participation in public policy development and lobbying including the total value of financial and in-kind contributions to political parties, politicians, and related institutions.

12. CONTENT DISSEMINATION:

Report on actions taken to improve performance in relation to quality of content issues (particularly in editorial coverage related to vulnerable audiences) and results. Report on the editorial content issues about which there have been complaints and, where possible, the relevant number of complaints and the responses of the company. Outline the processes for addressing these concerns.

13. AUDIENCE INTERACTION and RATINGS:

Report on methods to interact with audiences and results. Publish results and explain evaluation of ratings and surveys related to customer satisfaction.

14. MARKETING STANDARDS:

Explain company policy related to adherence to laws, standards, and voluntary codes related to marketing communications, including advertising, promotion, and sponsorship. Give details of actions taken to separate marketing communications (advertising and commercial activities) from editorial work.

15. MEDIA LITERACY:

Report on actions taken to empower audiences through media literacy skills development and results obtained.

16. PRIVACY and DEFAMATION:

Report on the number of complaints regarding breaches of privacy or actions against the company for libel or defamation.