



## **Ensia Code of Ethics**

**July 25, 2016**

Ensia is an independent non-profit magazine published by the Institute on the Environment at the University of Minnesota with support from major foundations and private individuals. Our mission is to share stories and ignite conversations that motivate and empower people to create a more sustainable future.

We recognize that journalistic integrity is key to success in accomplishing this mission, and we are committed to doing our work honestly, fairly, transparently and with excellence. This code of ethics, produced using guidance from the Online News Association's [Build Your Own Ethics Code](#) project and the ethics codes of other online and print publications and journalism organizations, offers some specific examples of what we do and do not do to achieve this goal. It is a working document, open to revision, and we welcome your comments and suggestions.

### **CONTENT**

#### **Accuracy**

- We strive to publish stories that are honest, accurate, truthful and fair. We do not distort or fabricate facts, imagery, sound or data.
- Contributors provide accurate context for all reporting.
- Contributors seek out diverse voices that can contribute important perspectives on the subject they're covering.
- Contributors ensure their sources are reliable. To the maximum extent possible, we make clear to our audience who and what our sources are and what motivations our sources may have.
- When we are unsure of information, we leave it out or make clear it has not been corroborated.
- We correct errors quickly, completely and visibly.
- We clearly distinguish fact from opinion in all content.
- We hold contributors responsible for the accuracy of their contributions. We also use fact-checkers to independently verify information before publication.
- Contributors may share parts of stories with sources or other experts in order to check facts. They should make clear to the sources that they are only checking facts, not providing an opportunity to change the writing or approach to the story.
- If contributors illustrate points with fictional examples, composites of actual situations, etc., they should clearly identify them as such.

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- We disclose if a contributor has a conflict of interest — perceived or otherwise.

### **Objectivity and Fairness**

- Although we strive for objectivity in our reporting, our content is predicated on the belief that a healthy and sustainable environment is both desirable and achievable.
- We are politically agnostic and inclusive.
- Opinion pieces (“Voices”) are clearly identified as such.
- If a story includes criticism of people or organizations, we give them the opportunity to respond.
- We do not publish rumors or other information we have not verified.
- We do not advocate for specific positions on environmental issues.

### **Quotations**

- We clean up random utterances such as pauses, “um” or “you know” unless they materially alter the meaning.
- We allow separate phrases of a quote separated by ellipsis (“I will raise taxes ... but only if necessary,” the president said.) as long as it does not change the source’s intended meaning.
- We allow separate phrases of a quote to be separated by attribution (“I will raise taxes,” the president said. “But only if necessary.”) as long as it does not change the source’s intended meaning.

### **Sources**

- We use primary sources where possible.
- We include source attribution in online stories and also use links, if available, to guide our audience to additional information.
- We do not publish information from sources we cannot name. Reporters may grant confidentiality only in an effort to find named sources for the information.
- We may use sources with a conflict of interest in stories, but details that signal the conflict of interest are included (e.g., a comment from a scientist who conducted a study funded by an organization that might benefit from the results).

### **Interviews**

- We do not pay interviewees for granting interviews.
- When reporting on an interview, contributors are not required to state the type of interview (i.e., whether it was in person, by telephone, video, Skype or email.)
- Contributors may at their discretion share quotes and/or explanations of complicated material with subjects to ensure the accuracy of the material under the

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condition that the contributor and editor make the final decision on how to handle any changes suggested as the result of the exchange.

- We edit interviews for length and readability without altering the meaning of the interviewees' answers. We allow interviewees to see the edited transcript if they desire, while making clear it is not an opportunity to change their answers, other than to provide explanations of complicated material to ensure the accuracy of the material (see above).

### **Plagiarism and Attribution**

- A link to a digital source is sometimes sufficient attribution; we need not always name the source in the text if the information is routine.
- When we are using someone else's exact words, we use quotation marks and attribution.
- Attribution is as specific as possible, including the name of the author and publication or organization of the source we are quoting.
- We cite news releases if they are our sources and quote them if using their exact words.
- When we use substantial material from our archives or from an author's previous work in a current story, we note that the material has been published before.
- Basic facts may be taken from other sources without varying the wording, but we will link to them where practical.

### **Race, Gender and Political Affiliation**

- We use racial, ethnic, gender, sexuality and political affiliation identifiers only when specifically germane to a story.
- We use plural references to avoid gender-specific pronouns when possible.

### **Data**

- We present all data in relevant context.
- We use primary sources of data and statistics where possible.
- We consider possible biases when choosing and using sources of statistics and other information and convey pertinent background information about sources to our audience as appropriate.
- We graphically depict data in an objective manner, using best practices for representing elements, trends, etc., in ways that do not inappropriately steer our audiences toward specific conclusions.

### **Headlines**

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- We try to write clever, creative headlines that will entice readers to click on and share our stories, but headlines do not make promises that our stories don't deliver.

### **Photo and Video**

- We edit or manipulate images only if doing so doesn't affect the news content of the image or the meaning viewers will take from it.
- We clearly label the source of all photos and videos.
- We only use photos for which we have licenses, that are available for fair use or for which we have received permission from the original source to publish.

### **CONTRIBUTORS**

#### **Diversity**

- We seek diverse pools of contributors, but always seek to engage the most qualified person. We encourage contributors to seek diverse sources for their stories.

#### **Community and Political Activities**

- Our contributors are welcome to be involved in the community and the issues we cover, but we disclose these involvements if they are pertinent to the story being told.
- Our contributors should disclose to us any community and political involvements involving topics they propose to cover before accepting an assignment.

#### **Conflicts of interest**

- Before accepting a commission to produce Ensia content, contributors should disclose any interests they have in a company or organization that would be considered an appropriate source. We will determine together if a conflict of interest exists, and if so, whether to cancel the story or make appropriate disclosures.
- Contributors are to avoid any conflict of interest that undermines their ability to report fairly. Contributors disclose any unavoidable conflicts or other situational factors that may validly affect their judgment or credibility, and we share that information with our audience as appropriate.
- Contributors and editors do not allow the interests of advertisers or others funding our work to affect the integrity of our journalism.

#### **Gifts, Free Travel and Other Perks**

- Contributors do not accept gifts from subjects or potential subjects of their

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coverage.

- Contributors may accept tickets or press passes to events and conferences we are covering or reviewing or that serve as potential sources for story ideas, but should disclose having done so and should not accept extra tickets for family or friends. They may attend receptions, meals and other gatherings sponsored by organizations or companies as part of those events, but should not preferentially cover or use as a source those organizations or companies as a result.
- Contributors must disclose to us if their story ideas were a result of, or any of their reporting done on, a comped trip.

### **Freelance Work by Employees**

- We permit freelancing by full-time employees if there is no conflict of interest, and we do not require advance notice. Contributors who do freelance work for other clients should avoid covering those clients or topics that advance the immediate interests of those clients in their work for Ensia.

### **Personal Ethics Statements**

- Ensia's ethics code prevails if staff and contributor personal ethics codes conflict with Ensia's ethics code.

## **RELATED CONTENT**

### **Online Commenting**

- We do not permit anonymous comments.
- We review every comment before publishing.
- We welcome comments on content we publish. While we are open to airing controversial and unpopular viewpoints, comments, like the rest of our content, should move conversations forward constructively toward solutions. We reserve the right to edit or to choose not to publish comments we deem to contain inappropriate content, including name-calling, offensive language, verbal abuse, etc. Comments that are self-promoting and offer little to the conversation will likely not be approved.

### **Corrections**

- We identify all substantive changes that have been made to online stories with an editors' note at the end of the piece.

### **Social Networks**

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- We accurately reflect the content of stories in social media posts.
- If we make a mistake in a social media post, we delete the original post and publish a corrected version with an indication that the new post is a correction. We note that we have edited or deleted inaccurate posts.
- Ensia staff members who identify themselves as such in their social media may express their opinions in social media as long as they don't adversely affect their ability to advance Ensia's mission. Ensia contributors may express their opinions freely in social media, but Ensia reserves the right to consider such opinions in assigning stories.
- We encourage staff members to retweet, reblog, share and otherwise pass along things they find interesting on social media with the understanding that their doing so represents their own interests and not those of Ensia.

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

### **Publisher / Advisory Council**

- The University of Minnesota Institute on the Environment does not direct or influence Ensia's content.
- We do not preferentially include the Institute on the Environment or IonE affiliates in our content. Contributors may include IonE sources in their reporting if they are the best sources for the purpose. When they do, the IonE affiliation is noted in the piece.
- We provide factual coverage in a neutral voice despite our publisher's involvement in the issues we cover. We disclose our affiliation for transparency reasons, but the affiliation should not be evident from a promotional voice or content.
- We explicitly indicate when anything we publish has a connection to IonE or our advisory council members.

### **Funders**

- We disclose all funding sources.
- Our funders may not see our stories before publication.
- Our funders may fund coverage of special topics generally, but they have no say in specific stories pursued and how they are reported and written.
- Our funders are not used as sources in stories they fund.
- To the extent possible, Ensia editors are not involved in conversations about funding.

### **Sponsors**

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- Individuals or organizations that provide support to Ensia in exchange for recognition are clearly identified as such.
- Sponsors are not allowed to suggest specific content.

#### **Advertising and Sponsored Content**

- Currently we do not accept advertising or publish sponsored content.

#### **Content Partners**

- We only republish content from other outlets with permission, and we clearly identify content that was previously published or is being concurrently published at another outlet.
- We share Ensia content with other outlets under a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported license.

#### **Other Conflicts of Interest**

- We disclose any other actual or potential conflicts of interest or relationships that reasonably might be perceived as a conflict of interest.

#### **MISCELLANEOUS**

##### **Community**

- We respect our audience and the subjects featured in our stories. We consider how our work may affect the subjects of our reporting and our world.

##### **Professional Conduct**

- We don't plagiarize or violate copyrights.
- We keep promises to sources, readers and the community.

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