

NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO follow-up policy on vetting guests

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From: Ellen Weiss, V.P. for News

For all guests, the following is required:

- * Ask the guest if he/she has any conflicts of interest. You can modify the question to be more descriptive; any financial, political, personal or other conflicts of interest. In some cases, the appearance of conflict of interest obvious to some, may not be obvious to the guest. For example, has the guest made any trips paid for by an organization having an interest in this story?
- * The editor needs to ascertain if the reporter has done due diligence. This includes not only the experts, but also probing about the people used in the story. Where did we get this person? What are the possible conflicts?

If time allows:

- * Request a current CV/resume either by fax or email.
- * Do a Google or Nexis search - include the person, the organization, the think tank, the institution, etc.
- * Blog/social network searches sometimes turn up information about people that can be relevant - obviously this need to go beyond the blog/network to find out if something is actually true.
- * Call our library staff and ask for their help.

For frequent guests – someone who either makes regular appearances on your show, or a source you regularly turn to as a reporter, or someone the network uses regularly.

- * All of the above
- * There needs to be a fuller vetting, even of people who are familiar to us. If they're very regular, we need to ask them from time to time if their situation has changed so as to present a conflict.

Consultants

- * On the rare occasions we use paid consultants, we will ask legal to draft a contract that specifically asks for disclosure of potential or actual conflicts and disclosure of other media clients.

What to do with this information:

- * Just because someone appears to have conflicts does not mean they can't be used. The key is transparency. If you decide to use the guest, the disclosure should be meaningful and not pro forma. You may not have time to do all the research needed to know if the conflict biases the guest. These are judgment calls that will have to be made at the time. But the bottom line is to do whatever we can under the circumstances to surface any conflicts. The goal is no surprises.
- * We will work to include new language about this in the ethics code.