

# EPA Code of Ethics

The Evangelical Press Association was formed for professional stimulation and fellowship. To that end, the EPA has adopted the following standards for professional ethics that we expect all members to purposefully endeavor to observe and act upon accordingly.

## **Principle 1: God's Mission and Our Human Contribution**

EPA Members affirm humans' unique role in God's creation, separate from the rest of creation and the work of human hands. As advanced technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), develop, and the lines between a human being and machine contributions blur, clearly defining roles will be increasingly important. Individual and organizational members agree to honor humans' unique role, led by the Holy Spirit, as described in the EPA Statement of Faith: "We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life."

As advanced technologies challenge the established approaches to publishing and content creation, EPA members are responsible for using spiritual discernment to evaluate new tools and methods against the ethics and standards described below. While the tools of the trade may change, our commitment to God's mission and an ethical human contribution do not.

## **Principle 2: Pursuit of Truth**

The foremost responsibility of EPA members is faithfulness to the will of God as expressed in the Bible and to the expression of the spiritual truths found therein. Content should be consistent with a biblical worldview and conservative evangelical values.

When EPA members and organizations are writing or developing content for a ministry publication, content creators should pay extra attention to the fact that all information is verifiable, accurate, and current, especially financial information. The narration of events should fairly and realistically portray the work of a ministry organization. Editors, writers, and content producers should avoid false, exaggerated, or misleading stories, photos, video clips, or social media posts. We should exercise greater awareness and humility regarding our personal biases in producing fact-based accounts of events.

### **2.1 Accuracy**

Great care should be taken to acknowledge authorship and sources and to verify the accuracy of facts and quotations of both original and previously published material. False or misleading statements can seriously damage the reputation and credibility of individuals and organizations.

### **2.2 Design and Photography**

Charts, graphs, illustrations, and photographs should not distort information, mislead readers, or make false claims. Alterations that change the substance or meaning of journalistic photographs should be avoided. Publications that use Artificial Intelligence should establish clear, publicly available guidelines about using AI to generate or modify visuals. Modifications of copyrighted material require consent from copyright holders and meeting the standards of "fair use." Finally, it is important to acknowledge when AI is used in images to alert the reader appropriately.

## **2.3 Editing**

Manuscript editing is a creative and cooperative enterprise between editor and writer. EPA editors should ensure accuracy in editing and layout for their publications. Viewpoints should be presented without distortion or malice. Editing should not change the author's basic intent or add substantial material without permission from the author. Editors should maintain timely and necessary communication with authors regarding editing changes, and authors should maintain the same timely communication in discussions about such changes.

## **2.4 Digital Publishing**

The same principles and practices that govern traditional journalism should also apply to digital publishing. However, because Internet material is easily borrowed and widely shared, those engaged in electronic journalism must make rigorous efforts at accuracy and copyright acknowledgment. In particular, it is important to be transparent about fact-checking and take steps to avoid passing along questionable information or spreading disinformation. Writers and editors should be wary of the temptations posed by the medium's immediacy and recognize the viral nature of online content spread through social media.

## **2.5 Writing**

Great writing represents reality in a truthful, comprehensive, and helpful way. Writers should minimize the use of secondary material that may be unreliable, be clear about potential conflicts of interest, and distinguish between personal opinions and verifiable facts. EPA members will not engage in plagiarism or the fabrication of people, events, and quotations.

Publications should clearly state how AI will be used in authoring content and how it should be cited and disclosed. EPA members will refrain from presenting AI personas as human journalists. Accountability for the quality of a publication's content rests with the author and editor, even if AI was used. Photo credits should identify when/if a photograph is AI-generated or augmented and follow established professional standards and style guides.

## **Principle 3. Honesty and Integrity**

EPA members should be honest and courageous, acting with integrity in service to the public and their organizations.

### **3.1 Copyright**

Outside of standard "fair use" exceptions, EPA publications do not publish any material without the consent of its authors or owners. Copyright laws must be scrupulously observed.

### **3.2 Compensation**

All financial agreements between authors, artists, and publications should take place in written form and be carefully followed. EPA members should fairly compensate authors and artists for the use of their materials in print, digital, and other "new media." Should publications plan to repurpose print content on digital platforms, the publication should let the author/artist know this at the agreement phase and consider offering payment accordingly, either through a pay increase or per-use compensation.

EPA publications should not pay less for material to be used in digital formats only, acknowledging that the same amount of work goes into both print and digital content.

### **3.3 Invasion of Privacy**

Since newsgathering is often intrusive, journalists should interact with sources sensitively and respectfully. Journalists should show compassion for individuals and/or groups who could be impacted negatively by coverage, as well as show compassion and restraint when interviewing juveniles, sex crime victims, and those inexperienced in dealing with the media. Exercise caution and care with those who might not understand what it means to have his/her words, pictures, or stories made public. If possible, explain those possible ramifications.

Journalists should exhibit sensitivity when reporting about or using as a source those who have been traumatized by past or current events or news coverage.

### **Principle 4: Independence**

EPA members should establish and protect editorial freedom for all and independence and support freedom of expression as a universal human right.

#### **4.1 Advertising, Sponsorship, and Donations**

Advertisements and sponsorships in EPA publications should not defraud or mislead readers. Editorial favors are not to be predicated upon the sale of advertising, nor should non-advertisers receive unfavorable treatment or be excluded from articles because they do not advertise. The products and presentation style in advertisements should not conflict with a periodical's Christian commitment. Paid advertising should be clearly distinguished from editorial content. Editors should not permit advertisers or product sponsors to vet articles before publication unless the publication has openly disclosed such a policy to its readership. Sponsored content, however, can be vetted by the sponsoring organization before publication. If publications (or the ministries they belong to) receive donations from individuals or organizations that appear in the publication's editorial content, the reader should be alerted to the financial relationship as part of transparency practices.

#### **4.2 Endorsements**

EPA members should avoid making endorsements that would compromise their editorial independence.

#### **4.3 Gifts**

Journalists should decline gifts to themselves or family members that may unduly influence their work. Token courtesies, such as meals, review books, or media passes, may be accepted in the normal course of editorial production.

#### **4.4 Travel**

Sponsorships, travel, and disclosure policies should ensure transparency and ethical practices in content creation, fostering trust between creators and their audiences while maintaining integrity in partnerships.

EPA members may participate in press trips (in which a sponsoring organization may cover major travel expenses) provided that they have made no commitment to specific content or perspective for an article and that sponsoring groups recognize their editorial independence. The traveling reporters should not be expected to

participate in promotional activity and should pay for personal expenses. It is also recommended they disclose the organization's sponsorship of the trip.

## **Principle 5: Fairness, Abuse Prevention, and Reporting**

EPA members and their organizations should exhibit trustworthiness, fair play, and civility in all interactions. In the event of a violation, reporting mechanisms should assure privacy, confidentiality, and care for those who report these events.

### **5.1 Conflicts of Interest**

EPA members must avoid real and apparent conflicts of interest in all aspects of their ministry. It is almost never appropriate to donate to political campaigns. If associated institutions, employees, or freelancers may donate, senior staff should write a public policy outlining guidelines and guardrails to establish editorial independence.

### **5.2 Newsgathering and Reporting**

Fairness and thoroughness should characterize newsgathering. Journalists and writers should not deceive sources concerning the purpose of their interviews or the subject matter of their articles, nor should they break laws during reporting. Journalists and writers should welcome independent checking of facts and quotes and be prepared to provide corroboration of sources.

The use of anonymous sources should be avoided except in cases where the source faces harm from having their identity revealed. The patience necessary in cultivating on-the-record sources is strongly encouraged. In handling controversial subjects, EPA members should investigate opposing viewpoints thoroughly. No essential information should intentionally be excluded from published reports. Distortion, sensationalism, and prejudice must be avoided. When interviews are conducted by email, this practice should be disclosed in a reasonable and practical way for the reader's awareness.

### **5.3 Publisher Relationships**

Publishers should treat employees, contributors, advertisers, and vendors fairly and openly. In its dealings as a publication, employment, race, gender, disability, or age discrimination and sexual harassment must not be permitted.

### **5.4 Author Relationships**

Writers should inform publications of potential conflicts of interest regarding family or close friendship ties to article subjects, past or present employment by article subjects, and the possibility of using interviews or other self-gathered material in other publications. When writing for multiple publications, writers should also reveal potential conflicts of interest regarding competing publication audiences.

## **Principle 6: Openness and Disclosure**

EPA members should be open and forthright in all their activities.

### **6.1 Circulation**

For EPA members who accept advertising, circulation reports must be publicly available, verifiable, and annually updated.

## **6.2 Restrictions on Reporting**

If a news source asks an EPA member journalist for anonymity, questions in writing, or other special conditions, such arrangements should be developed in consultation with editors. When appropriate, readers should be informed of these agreements. If a source requests confidentiality, an EPA member should honor that agreement when the source provides a reasonable rationale based on personal safety or that of a third party, privacy violation, or endangerment.

## **Principle 7: Accountability and Responsibility**

Under their biblical commitments, EPA publications aspire to operate with the highest standards of accountability and responsibility, as described in this Code of Ethics.

### **7.1 Corrections and Clarifications**

When substantive mistakes are made, whatever their origin, EPA members will publish a correction or clarification as soon as possible. When an article's subject and a publication disagree over a report's accuracy, the publication should offer the aggrieved party reasonable space on a letter page or in another appropriate forum for its point of view.

### **7.2 Peer Accountability**

EPA members who see their colleagues violating the principles of ethical journalism should voice their concerns, first to the individual or publication involved. EPA members should strive to resolve these conflicts and settle the issue or problem promptly, honoring all involved.

Editors and publishers should submit disputes and difficulties to representative panels of peers, either established by the publication or via an ad-hoc EPA committee, for helpful advice leading to reconciliation and spiritual and professional growth.

### **7.3 Resolving Complaints**

Unresolved questions or concerns that arise should be directed to the executive director in writing.

The EPA board reserves the right to take remedial action when appropriate.

**UPDATED: Fall 2024**

**ADOPTED BY EPA BOARD: NOV. 4, 2024**

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