

## ETHICS AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY

The Center for Michigan and its publications, Bridge Michigan and BridgeDetroit, are committed to upholding high standards and journalistic integrity. Our readers and members trust us to comport ourselves ethically and with impartiality - we're dedicated to maintaining that trust. The intent of these policies is to allow the Center's employees the freedom to show up as their full selves in society as much as possible, while also upholding the journalistic values of the Center's publications. This policy is intended to help staff, supervisors and newsroom managers work together to find that balance.

Founded in 1909, the Society of Professional Journalists is the nation's most broad-based journalism organization, dedicated to encouraging the free practice of journalism and stimulating high standards of ethical behavior. All Center for Michigan employees are expected to abide by the Society for Professional Journalists Code of Ethics.

As members of the Institute for Nonprofit News, we comply with their editorial independence standards and do not advocate for any policies or legislation beyond freedom of the press and First Amendment rights that ensure the public has open access to the public's information.

To ensure that we operate with transparency and accountability and to avoid any real or perceived conflicts of interest, we have adopted these additional policies that all Center for Michigan employees are expected to uphold. Relatives and members of an employee's household cannot fairly be made subject to our rules, but it should be recognized that their employment or their involvement in causes can at least appear to compromise our integrity.

We require all employees and Board of Directors members to annually file conflict of interest statements disclosing affiliations with nonprofit groups and business interests held by them and their household members.

The Center trusts its employees to exercise their best judgment and does not anticipate routine disciplinary action for missteps in applying the policy. However, deliberate and continued disregard for this policy may result in disciplinary action.

***No single policy can foresee every circumstance. This policy is a framework to affirm principles of trust and transparency. Questions no doubt will arise. When they do, we expect employees to consult with managers to uphold the Center for Michigan's standards of integrity.***

## **I. Participation in Public Life**

We believe that outside interests and pursuits make employees more interesting, productive and better at their jobs and encourage vigorous lives outside of work. The Center for Michigan encourages employees to be involved in their communities, but outside activities that present real or perceived conflicts of interest or partisanship can compromise our journalistic integrity and should be avoided.

Employees may participate in nonpartisan, issue-oriented activities, such as expressing support for human rights. Be mindful, though, that events can take on a partisan tone, and participation should not be inconsistent with this policy. When in doubt, discuss the activity with a manager in advance of your participation.

## **II. Political Activity**

The Center for Michigan respects the right of our employees to participate in the democratic process by voting. We hold voting to be a sacred right and will never ask employees about their voting preferences.

Employees should in no way attempt to influence elections in their personal capacity or give the appearance of doing so. That means employees may not make political contributions to candidates or causes, sign petitions, or display yard signs or bumper stickers. Employee attendance at partisan events such as political rallies should be avoided, unless as a journalist in a role covering the event. Employees should also avoid political activities that may compromise their professional integrity or impartiality or damage the credibility of the organization.

Employees are prohibited from running for elected office and accepting appointment to a public body or commission.

When in doubt, we require employees to inform their managers and to discuss whether the activity in question is appropriate.

## **III. Board Service**

Employees may not serve on boards or organizations that are political in nature, take positions on political issues or donate to political causes. Board service on any for-profit company is discouraged.

Serving on the board of another organization can lead to real or perceived conflicts of interest. All Center for Michigan employees must disclose in the annual conflict of interest statements any membership on the boards or advisory committees of outside organizations. Employees should discuss prospective board service with their manager and receive written approval before accepting any board appointment.

The Center for Michigan has no wish to impede good community citizenship. Normally, the restriction on joining boards or advisory committees will not apply to organizations that are

highly unlikely to generate news of interest to the Bridge publications and that do not generally seek to shape public policy or accept taxpayer subsidies. These typically include houses of worship, community charities, fine arts groups, hobby groups, youth athletic leagues, country clubs and alumni groups.

#### **IV. Outside Employment**

The Center is concerned with conflicts of interest that create actual or potential job-related issues, especially in the areas of confidentiality, journalistic integrity, productivity, safety, security and morale.

Outside jobs should not interfere with primary employment for the Center for Michigan, compromise journalistic integrity or involve interactions with sources or subjects of coverage. All employees are required to disclose to and seek written approval from their manager for any outside employment, interests and pursuits that may be real or perceived conflicts of interest. When in doubt, discuss the prospective employment with your manager before accepting the work.

Writing jobs and freelance work must not interfere with the employees' responsibilities to the Bridge publications and should be for publications with similar ethical standards. Reporters must receive written approval from a manager before undertaking freelance work.

#### **V. Interaction with Funders**

As a nonprofit, the Center for Michigan is funded by myriad organizations across the country, some of which may appear in stories. All Center for Michigan publications maintain the strictest editorial standards and cede no right of review or influence of editorial content. Our journalism is edited to avoid bias and ensure accuracy and fairness. When donors are the topic of a story, it will be disclosed by an editorial note.

We subscribe to standards of editorial independence adopted by the Institute for Nonprofit News. Our organization retains full authority over editorial content to protect the best journalistic and business interests of our organization. We maintain a firewall between news coverage decisions and sources of all revenue. Acceptance of financial support does not constitute implied or actual endorsement of donors or their products, services or opinions.

We make public all donors who give a total of \$5,000 or more per year. A full list of our funders can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

#### **VI. Personal Benefit**

Our journalists do not cover stories that financially or otherwise benefit them or members of their household. On rare occasions in which a story directly involves or would benefit a Center for Michigan employee, such associations will be disclosed prominently in an editor note.

## **VII. Gifts**

Employees are expected to refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment.

We pay our own way when traveling for editorial or business purposes. At times, professional organizations may offer to help journalists attend training and other related professional development conferences by paying for travel and accommodations. In those cases, employees, in consultation with their manager, are allowed to accept travel reimbursement or waived fees from journalism or training groups.

We donate or return unsolicited gifts. We do not accept cash, and no gifts are accepted if there are strings attached. It is acceptable for employees to consume food or beverages as part of an event they are participating in, such as a speech or panel discussion, and accepting token gifts valued under \$50 is allowed.

We do not ask news sources or public officials for favors. We do not use our position to gain access to events or opportunities outside of newsgathering. We avoid situations that could bring our integrity into question.

On occasion, journalism or technology groups will pay employees for consulting work related to their employment at the Center. Those fees are paid to the Center for Michigan.

When in doubt, we require employees to inform their managers and to discuss whether the activity in question is appropriate.

## **VIII. Outside Appearances and Acceptance of Speaking Fees**

The Center for Michigan encourages employees to appear on radio and television and to participate in panels. They do so as part of their job and as representatives of the Center for Michigan's publications. There is value in such appearances to engage communities on issues of importance to the state and to expand our audience. Managers should be consulted in advance of such appearances.

We encourage employees to speak to groups across the political spectrum. Employees should avoid entanglements that could call our integrity or nonpartisanship into question. Appearances do not constitute an endorsement of group beliefs.

Some organizations offer speaking fees or other items of value for appearances. The Center's reputation is dependent upon fidelity to nonpartisanship in our communications, practices and appearances; therefore, acceptance of money or gifts can generate ethical concerns.

The following rules govern:

- Employees may not request money or anything of value for their appearance, nor should they request or accept reimbursement for travel expenses from the host without written approval from a manager.

- Any speaking fees must be paid to the Center— not to the employee — in the form of a tax-deductible donation. Exceptions may be made for speaking fees of \$200 or less, with written approval from a manager.
- Employees shall not participate in an event if the host requests or implies the host expects something in return from the Center or its journalism coverage.

When in doubt, we require employees to inform their managers and to discuss whether the activity in question is appropriate.

## **IX. Social Media**

The Center for Michigan respects that employees have outside interests and are free to post content about a variety of topics, so long as it does not call our integrity into question. Our organization's diversity strengthens our journalism, and employees can bring their backgrounds, identity and experiences to their social accounts. The following guidelines should be considered:

- Employees are encouraged to use social media as another way to share news and information with the community.
- It is the responsibility of journalists and staff members to avoid spreading misinformation or sharing personal views on news related to subjects/issues covered by the Bridge publications.
- Employees are expected to conduct themselves respectfully and professionally when interacting with the public on social media.
- Employees should not air opinions about politics, public policy or partisan issues.
- Employees should not like or reshare partisan posts or use their work platforms to criticize others.

***– Adopted August 2024***