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Description of document: U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB)- Procedures for Violations of Journalistic Standards 2024

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Source of document: FOIA Request
USAGM FOIA Office
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330 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20237
ATTN: FOIA/Privacy Act Officer
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U.S. AGENCY FOR
GLOBAL MEDIA

Office of the General Counsel
Freedom of Information Act Office

330 Independence Avenue SW | Washington, DC 20237 | usagm.gov

July 16, 2024

Re: FOIA File No.: **FOIA24-092**

By this letter, we grant the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA request you submitted to the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) seeking policies and procedures related to journalistic standards lapses. We release these records in full and without redaction.

I. Your FOIA Request

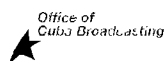
You submitted your request via FOIA.gov on June 30, 2024. Specifically, you requested “[a] copy of the policies and procedures at the Office of Cuba Broadcasting governing how journalistic standards lapses will be addressed, as well as roles and responsibilities of personnel and offices involved.” You limited your request “to records from the last two years (2023 and 2024).”

The agency acknowledged receipt of your request via email on July 1, 2024 and assigned it tracking number FOIA24-092.

II. Search for and Release of Responsive Agency Records

Congress enacted the Freedom of Information Act to “ensure an informed citizenry, vital to the functioning of a democratic society, needed to check against corruption and to hold the governors accountable to the governed.” *Nat’l Labor Relations Bd. v. Robbins Tire & Rubber Co.*, 437 U.S. 214, 242 (1978). The law provides the public with the right to receive records and information from the government in order to further democratic principles and allow for independent evaluation of government action.

In furtherance of those interests, we conducted a search that we reasonably calculated to identify the records you sought. This office contacted the agency’s Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB), as



that office would possess any records related to internal OCB procedures or policies. OCB provided the attached nine pages of records responsive to your request. We release these records to you in full and without fee.

For your information, Congress excluded three discrete categories of law enforcement and national security records from the requirements of the FOIA. See 5 U.S.C. 552(c). This response is limited to those records that are subject to the requirements of the FOIA. This is a standard notification that is given to all our requesters and should not be taken as an indication that excluded records do, or do not, exist.

III. Administrative Remedies

This completes the processing of your request. You may administratively appeal any adverse determinations made by the agency to the Access Appeals Committee. You must submit your appeal by email to foia@usagm.gov within 90 days of the date of this letter. You should include any information you believe indicates an error in this determination. You may also wish to contact USAGM's FOIA Liaison, Stephen McGinley, for additional assistance at smcginley@usagm.gov or 202-920-2366.

The Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) also mediates disputes between FOIA requesters and Federal agencies as a non-exclusive alternative to litigation. If you are requesting access to your own records, OGIS does not have the authority to handle requests made under the Privacy Act of 1974. If you wish to contact OGIS, you may email them at ogis@nara.gov or call 1-877-684-6448.

Sincerely,



Matthew Pollack, Assistant General Counsel
Office of General Counsel
U.S. Agency for Global Media



OFFICE OF CUBA BROADCASTING

OCB's PROCEDURES FOR VIOLATIONS OF JOURNALISTIC STANDARDS AND THE STANDARDS EDITOR'S ROLE IN INVESTIGATING JOURNALISTIC LAPSES

June 2024

Editorial Lapses Process

The Standards and Best Practices Editor reviews editorial lapses and recommends action depending on the severity of the incident – and depending on whether the lapse has happened previously. Journalistic lapses will be brought to the attention of the Standards and Best Practices Editor who will advise the Editor in Chief and The Head of the appropriate platform of the occurrence. When called for, senior management will be informed. The Director will determine if additional reporting is needed to USAGM.

Some of the possible situations:

- 1. Minor correction** – A OCB story might attribute a quote to the wrong individual, or misattribute a statistic. Perhaps a story requires more balance and background. The Standards Editor will advise the Editor in Chief and the Head of Platform of the error, along with a recommendation on how to correct the error. If called for, appropriate notice will be provided.
- 2. A OCB story, series or program with a significant violation of journalistic ethics** – Possible scenarios include but are not limited to such things as if a program host engages in inappropriate comments about a politician, or head of state, a domestic or foreign policy initiative, or impugns the integrity of a colleague or of the agency itself in OCB content or in his/her personal social media accounts. The Standards Editor would review the situation and would report their findings to the Editor in Chief and the appropriate Head of platform and senior leadership. The Standards Editor would recommend possible disciplinary action, taking into account such things as the severity of the comments and whether the lapse is the employee's first. If required, the Editor will escalate their findings to Labor and Employee Relations (LER). The Standards Editor could also undertake a counseling session with the journalist to ensure that s/he understands the severity of his/her action.
- 3. An individual journalist with a pattern of violations** – A potential scenario an allegation that a journalist has repeatedly plagiarized content from other sources without providing proper attribution. Standards Editor would investigate the journalist's work, current and past to determine, as best as possible, the original source of the work. If a pattern of plagiarism is discovered, they will immediately report their findings – including a potential recommendation of punitive action - to the Editor in Chief, the appropriate head of platform and senior leadership. As necessary, they would report their findings to LER.

4. Widespread pattern of journalistic violations over a period of time – One possible example could be a head of platform or Supervisor, for personal reasons, tampers with the critical coverage of a story. The Standards Editor would investigate the charges, and if they are found to be true, would recommend disciplinary action to the OCB Director. They might, as necessary, escalate the issue to LER and to the Office of General Counsel (OGC). Additional remedies could include remedial training for all members of the Agency.



OFFICE OF CUBA BROADCASTING

EDITORIAL PROCEDURES

March 2023

Foreword

OCB management has established newly-improved editorial approval workflows, building upon long-established editorial practices. While approval workflows existed at OCB previously, they were not standardized.

All OCB workflows for journalists follow the principles of the VOA/OCB News Standards and Best Practices Guide. The editorial process is guided by these published guidelines with strict adherence to them as well as the highest levels of journalistic standards.

In order to ensure that all OCB news reports and programs are in compliance with the Best Practices Guide, senior content editors, platform leads, supervisors, producers, editors, reporters/stringers (all journalists) are responsible for following the guidelines and ensuring strict adherence.

All journalists must review the News Standards and Best Practices Guide and sign that s/he has read and agrees to follow the practices incorporated within. This guide, with corresponding updates, is distributed to every employee at the beginning of every calendar year and is kept updated as warranted. Repeated failure to follow the principles of the Best Practices Guide may result in personnel action.

Employees must also complete mandatory Balanced and Bias-Free Reporting training and Copyright Usage classes every two years. In addition, OCB requires additional journalistic training on topics that are particular to OCB and are offered throughout the year. Newly hired personnel will be required to complete training on journalistic standards and best practices as part of the onboarding process.

A copy of this manual will be distributed to all OCB employees and subsequently to newly hired personnel.

Editorial Process

The news day begins with an agency-wide editorial meeting where the day's potential content is discussed, beginning with stories that are of importance or relevance to the people of Cuba. Those in attendance also review original content, enterprise stories, planned events, features, or any other content that may be of interest as applied to a particular platform. Show topics that will be included on programs and special coverage/series are discussed to keep all platforms informed as to the stories slated for that day.

The meeting takes place with editorial guidance provided by the Chief Content Officer / Editor-in-Chief / Central News Director. In attendance are the leads of all the Marti distribution platforms, Executive Producers, Supervisory Editors and Shift Editors. All members of the OCB staff are encouraged to pitch stories at this meeting or through their Supervisors. Staff can also submit story ideas in writing directly to the Editor-in-Chief.

Assignments of stories are discussed and made, if needed, at this meeting for further follow-up by the Executive Producer, Supervisory Editor and/or Senior Editor of each team.

The OCB Standards and Best Practices Editor attends all editorial meeting and flags potential journalistic issues that may need a supervisor's attention. S/he monitors such stories and is available for consultation to all OCB staff.

OCB trusts its journalists but verifies the integrity of their work by requiring two-source authentication of OCB content before it is published or broadcast.

Meetings and editorial discussions are held throughout the day to ensure work is reviewed at all stages to keep editorial content accurate and unbiased. In all news organizations editorial errors can occur. Most are small and infrequent and are typically spotted and corrected quickly, with appropriate consequences applied.

Continuous monitoring of a variety of news sources takes place in order to make editorial decisions that ensure Marti content is timely and relevant.

An afternoon editorial meeting takes place to reviews changes in story assignments, any developments and possible follow-ups. This meeting also serves

as a postmortem to review content already produced and published, and – if necessary – to discuss lessons learned and best practices in order to avoid potential pitfalls in the future.

Through the course of these twice-daily meetings, OCB management steers OCB editorial decision-making, makes daily coverage assignments and reviews productions to ensure sound journalistic content.

Similar editorial and planning meetings are called on an ad-hoc basis when circumstances call for a more detailed post-mortem discussion or to plan content included in special coverage (e.g. long-form content, series or special reports).

Editorial Workflows

These workflows apply to the creation of content on all of the OCB distribution platforms; Radio/TV Marti, martinoticias.com and all audiovisual content. The standardization of these workflows are meant to facilitate the sharing of information in a multimedia environment.

- **Radio –**

News stories are assigned by the Supervisory Editor and written by the journalist. Story is reviewed by the Producer and then reviewed again by the Shift Supervisory Editor prior to broadcast.

As assigned, Radio programs are re-purposed for the web and social media. Those stories have an added level of review within the digital platform.

- **Television / Audiovisual –**

News packages, digital shorts, etc. are produced by the journalist and video editor, reviewed by the producer, and the reviewed again by the supervisor prior to broadcast or posting on the web or social media platform.

- **Digital / Web and Social Media –**

Stories are written by the journalists, reviewed by the multimedia news supervisor and the reviewed again by the shift supervisor prior to posting on the web or social media.

Social media posts are also under the supervision of the Digital Shift Editor and the S&P Editor.

The reporter, stringer and/or producer doing the live streaming will submit the topics to be covered in writing for approval to the Supervisor or Shift Editor. In the case of breaking news, the Supervisor or Shift Editor will monitor the live streaming for compliance to journalistic practices.

Additional Review Process

Supervisory staff within each platform provide oversight and assistance in case editorial issues arise. Any irregularities are brought immediately to the attention of the Editor-in-Chief who, at his/her discretion escalates to the Standards and Best Practices Editor. The “*Violations of Journalistic Standards*” protocol are then followed.

- **Spot-checks –**

Senior managers (Editor-in-Chief, Deputy Director and S&P Editor) do unannounced spot checks and attend radio recordings. Web posts, including written articles, audiovisual content and social media posts, are subject to spot-check as well as personal social media accounts in compliance with the Standards and Best Practices Guide.

Violations of journalistic standards are brought to the attention of the Standards Editor and OCB senior management.

- **Program Reviews –**

Under the direction of the Standards and Best Practices Editor, OCB conducts annual program reviews in accordance with published guidelines issued by the USAGM Office of the CEO in May 2021.

Program reviews use established journalistic criteria to evaluate OCB programming in order to provide network leadership an independent evaluation of the work.

OCB submits the resulting report to the Office of Policy and Research who submits to Congress to meet compliance requirements.

Procedures for Violations

OCB follows USAGM’s published procedures for Violations of the Principles, Standards or Journalistic Code of Ethics. OCB will distribute these procedures to all staff. Any disciplinary action to be taken will depend on the severity of the violation, as detailed in the published procedures.