

A large, semi-transparent white geometric grid pattern (hexagons) covers the top half of the image, while the bottom half features a close-up photograph of a woman with dark skin, wearing a vibrant, multi-colored headwrap and a dark green dress with a red and yellow leaf-like pattern. She is smiling warmly at the camera. In the background, there's a blurred view of what appears to be a vehicle and some trees.

GUIDANCE ON ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNICATIONS



AUSTRALIAN
COUNCIL
FOR
INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

These guidelines explain how to create an Ethical Decision-Making Framework for Communications, to help your organisation address **Compliance Indicator 6.2.1** and **Compliance Indicator 8.1.2** in the ACFID Code of Conduct.

An Ethical Decision-Making Framework (EDMF) for Communications is a tool to help your organisation make ethical decisions when creating and publishing communications content. It is designed to be applied when operating in ethically 'grey areas', where it might not be immediately clear if an image or story should be used.

An EDMF uses a framework of structured discussions at important moments during the storytelling process. It outlines key issues to be considered, when discussions should happen,

who should be involved and what personnel should do if they are unable to make a decision.

Implementing an EDMF helps organisations make ethically sound decisions, that are consistent with their mission, values and purpose. It helps ensure all personnel know what to do when faced with difficult decisions and minimises the risks associated with communications, both to our organisations and the people we strive to support.

ACFID has developed this guidance to help members – no matter their size or scope – work through a process of developing an EDMF that is relevant to their organisation.



What is an EDMF?



Why do we need an EDMF?



How to create an EDMF



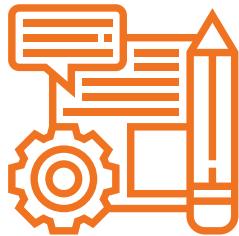
An example EDMF



Code of Conduct requirements



Useful information on EDMFs



Section 1

What is an EDMF?

Every day, we make decisions. Whether we admit it or not, these decisions are always influenced by our values – our deeper sense of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’.

An ‘ethical decision-making framework’ is a fancy name for a simple tool that helps people make ethical decisions.

When we work in organisations with other people, we keep making decisions every day. However, it can be harder to make shared decisions when different people – with different sets of values – need to agree. Although the Code of Conduct includes certain requirements about which images and messages cannot be used, not all decisions are clear-cut.

An EDMF outlines how your organisation will make decisions

about its communications materials, particularly those that fall into ethical ‘grey areas’. It captures the key issues that your organisation will discuss when making decisions and when these discussions should take place. An EDMF will also outline who will be involved in communications decisions and what people should do if they are unable to make a decision.

If this sounds a little abstract, have a look at our [example EDMF for Communications](#) to get a clearer idea.

Your EDMF should reflect the size and scope of your organisation and the range of communications it produces. You will need to think about how it will be best implemented in your organisation, who might be involved and how it might be integrated into existing procedures.

Does an EDMF have to be a stand-alone document?

This document includes guidelines for the development of a single EDMF for communications. However, some members may choose to incorporate the components of an EDMF into other existing policies or guidelines. Either approach would be

compliant with the ACFID Code of Conduct.

How is an EDMF different to other policies?

An EDMF is an overarching framework designed to help your organisation have a clear process for making decisions about the images, messages and stories used in public communications. ACFID members are expected to have other policies or procedures that will also support ethical communications. These include:

- Organisational requirements for the collection of information, images and stories (6.2.1)
- Organisational protocols for the approval of public materials (6.2.2)

- Privacy policy (7.2.2)
- Child Safeguarding policy that includes clauses relating to the collection and publication of communications (1.4)
- Staff Code of Conduct and HR policies that may include requirements for ethical behaviour of staff when collecting and publishing storytelling content. (9.4.1)

These policies and procedures should be referenced and integrated into your EDMF where appropriate.

Do our partners need to have an EDMF?

The Code of Conduct does not require that your partners have an EDMF. However, depending on your organisation, it may be appropriate to provide training on the issues raised in your EDMF or to ensure your partners are consulted in the

development of your EDMF. This is particularly important if your partners are directly involved in sourcing or sharing images, stories or information for your organisation.



Section 2

Why do we need an EDMF?

ACFID requires all Members to develop an Ethical Decision-Making Framework (EDMF) for Communications, as outlined in **Compliance Indicator 6.2.1** and **Compliance Indicator 8.1.2** of the Quality Assurance Framework.

Due to the rapidly changing nature of communications and publishing, an EDMF for Communications is an important way for NGOs to ensure their communications are **ethical and lawful**, and **protect their stakeholders**.

As part of their work, NGOs share some important – yet difficult – stories. Sometimes their stories show injustice and harsh realities. While these are important stories for the world to hear, inherent in undertaking these activities is a level of risk. The impact of **unconscious bias** is also pervasive and, by its nature, very difficult to remedy. Yet it also creates **risk** in the storytelling and publishing process.

Misunderstanding cultural norms and mismanaging storytelling content can harm both the people NGOs strive to support, as well as their organisations. For example, asylum seekers may be targeted for sharing stories about human rights abuses. Children may be targeted by people seeking to abuse them. The personal reputation and confidence of people who've shared their stories may be damaged if their stories are misused and they may face retribution from their community. Their organisation may suffer damage to their brand and reputation if they publish insensitive materials. These are just a few possible **risks**.

An EDMF is one element in a suite of tools to reduce these risks, as far as possible.

How have communications changed over the last decade?

The communications and publishing landscape has dramatically changed during the last decade. The widespread use of smartphones (with high-quality cameras) has created an avalanche of 'storytelling content' in the form of photographs,

videos and text, while the swift development of social media platforms has, in tandem, created a speedy way to publish and consume this storytelling content. **Nearly 90%** of Australians now own a smartphone and **nearly 80%** use social media.

Why are stories so important?

By their very nature, stories are deeply connected to our values. Stories help us to connect with others, empathise, and discern 'right' and 'wrong'. Stories are also extremely powerful tools for influencing society. The rapid influx of powerful stories, particularly over the last decade, has added considerable complexity to our society's conversation on 'right and wrong', which in turn has strong influences on consumer behaviour.

As a result of these changes, content marketing is rapidly growing. In North America, **more than 80%** of consumer-focused businesses use content marketing. Of these, **more than 95%** use content for social media. **More than 80%** of consumer-focused businesses plan to increase or maintain their current spending on content marketing, while content marketing gets **three times more leads** than paid search advertising.

How NGOs have been affected

NGOs have not escaped these radical shifts. They've had to change the way they promote themselves and communicate with their supporters, and they've had to change the way they collect and store storytelling content.

This rapid influx in – and desire for – storytelling content has

meant more values-based decisions need to be made more rapidly at NGOs, regardless of their size. With little guidance on how to make values-based decisions for storytelling content, some NGOs have struggled to appropriately face the risks associated with unethical, **unlawful** and **higher-risk** communications content.

Why trust is so important for the NGO sector

The international development and humanitarian sector is unique because it's reliant on the goodwill and trust of its supporters more than other sectors. While for-profit companies exchange tangible goods and services for money, international non-government organisations (INGOs) trade something intangible. In essence, INGOs trade a promise of work done, in exchange for donations. While the product of the donations is very tangible – goods and services delivered to beneficiaries, or advocacy work on their behalf – these don't land in the hands of those who parted with their donation. The value of the INGO's promise, therefore, is weighed in the currency of *trust*. Their donor's trust in the INGO's abilities, honesty and ability to follow through on their promises is therefore crucial to the viability of their organisation.

INGOs are also unique because they work with the world's most vulnerable people and communities. By their nature, Australian INGOs are often backed by governments, multilateral organisations, corporate donors and (comparatively) wealthy citizens – making them powerful in relation to their beneficiaries. This power difference – between the helpers and those being helped – is fertile breeding ground for ethical dilemmas and possible abuses of power. Regulation in this sector is therefore extremely important.



Section 3

How to create an EDMF

These steps explain how to create your Ethical Decision-Making Framework for Communications. While they're listed in order, some will happen concurrently. This is particularly the case for consultation, which should happen throughout the process. Working through these steps is useful even if you are integrating your EDMF into an existing policy.

Step 1: Reflect on your values

"How do our organisation's values affect our storytelling?"

First, reflect on your organisation's values. Your values (such as compassion, honesty and justice) guide your organisation's actions. 'Ethical action' happens when your actions align with your values. Your values are not your policies or procedures. Your values explain *how* and *why* your organisation does what it does.

Your reflection exercise may involve a group of staff from across the organisation. Consider how your organisation's values relate to storytelling and communications. Consider why your organisation chose these values. You can reflect on:

- Your organisation's values
- Your organisation's mission statement
- Other guiding documents, such as:
 - The ACFID Code of Conduct and Quality Assurance Framework
 - United Nations conventions and declarations
 - Ethics codes by other organisations
 - Best-practice communications toolkits for NGOs.
- Your recently published communications content.

Step 2: Review your current policies

"How do we ensure our stories are ethical?"

Next, review your organisation's existing policies, guidelines, procedures and external commitments that relate to ethical storytelling and communications. Identify any gaps or weaknesses that can increase the risk of unethical and unlawful communications.

Assess whether your current policies, guidelines, procedures and external commitments are actually being followed and met. For example, your **informed consent** process and **story image storage** system may need review. You may want to review these policies, where appropriate:

- Communications Policy
- Image Policy
- Child Safeguarding Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Risk Policy
- Disability Policy
- Gender Equality Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Staff Selection and Recruitment Policy
- Reconciliation Action Plan

Step 3: Risk assessment

"How does storytelling create risks?"

Identifying risks associated with your communications, and the strategies to mitigate them, is an important step in the development of your EDMF. Review all communications activities and operations and consider the potential risks they pose. This could be achieved through team workshops, establishing a multi-disciplinary working group, or possibly by engaging an external expert to contribute to this assessment. It is helpful to have a range of personnel involved.

The following questions will help you to identify potential risks. It is not an exhaustive list and there may be other areas of your operations that you need to consider.

- What consequences could individuals or groups face for contributing to your communication materials? Are the potential risks greater for certain groups or individuals that you work with? Do existing procedures help mitigate these risks?
- Are there clear procedures in place for how content is collected and approved before publishing? Are existing procedures being followed consistently?
- What risks do current processes for storing and filing images and information pose to your organisation or contributors, including children?
- Are your policies and procedures well-understood and implemented by personnel involved at different stages of the communications process?
- What role do partners or other third parties have in your communications process? Do they have the knowledge, capacity and experience to implement any relevant policies or procedures?
- What areas of your operations are higher-risk and therefore likely to require additional checks and monitoring?

- Are there risks to the well-being of staff or volunteers as a result collecting or being involved in communications work?
- What risks could the sharing of material from third parties (e.g. news outlets) have for your organisation?
- What are the potential reputational risks created by your communications materials?
- Has your organisation had complaints or issues with its communications materials in the past that you can learn from?

Higher-risk activities may require more comprehensive procedures to be developed. These include:

- responding to humanitarian emergencies
- operating in regions with active conflicts and/or health epidemics
- advocating on highly political issues; and
- working with communities with intergenerational trauma, sexual violence and family violence.

A risk rating matrix, such as the following, can be used to assess the level of risk, as relevant for your organisation:

| | | CONSEQUENCE | | |
|------------|--------|-------------|--------|--------|
| | | Low | Medium | High |
| LIKELIHOOD | High | Medium | High | High |
| | Medium | Low | Medium | High |
| | Low | Low | Low | Medium |

Consider how you might **mitigate any risks**. You might need to:

- Assess the effectiveness of existing policies and procedures
- Include strategies in your EDMF or other documents to address or reduce identified risks
- Have effective complaints handling procedures in place

It can be helpful to conduct a **SWOT** analysis (strengths,

weaknesses, opportunities and threats) for your communications activities. Tools4development have a general risk **assessment** template suitable for a smaller organisation that you can download.

When completed, your EDMF should help cultivate the organisational culture necessary to maintain ethical communications of the highest level and mitigate potential risks.

Step 4: Consultation within the organisation

"Who can help develop our EDMF?"

Identify key stakeholders for participation in the EDMF development process. Ideally, participation will include **staff from across the organisation** (for example, programs, communications, marketing and fundraising). This will depend on the size and nature of your organisation. It may also make sense to have a working group with key staff that develop the EDMF then lead its implementation across the organisation.

Work together to define the objectives and purpose of the EDMF for your organisation. Consider the issues to be addressed within the EDMF, as well as the process for developing it.

Consider how you will involve your **governing body or relevant subcommittee** (for example a risk committee) in the development phase of your EDMF, instead of just at the

review and approval stage. Governance members are affected by policies relating to communications (for example, being a spokesperson for the organisation), and can also have a keen interest in the prevention of the particular **risks** relating to communications. They may also be involved in other organisations that have good practice examples of how to address these risks.

Consider how you might engage your **overseas staff and/or implementation partners** to gain an insight into cultural understandings of the different aspects of ethical storytelling. Consider their practices and capacity to implement the policy to the standards required.

If you work with **particular communities**, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or people seeking asylum, you may wish to consult with representatives who can express these people's particular concerns and desires concerning storytelling.

Step 4: Consultation with partners

"How will our partners be affected by our EDMF?"

Consult outside your organisation to inform your EDMF. For example, you can consult with other NGOs, your partner organisations, external fundraising contractors, and other affiliates of your international networks.

Discuss potential **risks**, requirements and practical implementation with members of your international networks. Consider how appropriate risk management will be demonstrated and how incidents would be managed in these situations where there could be differing requirements across different legal entities and legal jurisdictions.

Step 5: Drafting your EDMF

Your organisation's EDMF should be tailored to its specific needs. You can create a standalone Ethical Decision-Making Framework for Communications or you can add your EDMF to your existing Communications Policy. Section 4, **an example EDMF**, explains what you might include in your EDMF.

Consider your stakeholder groups when designing the format of your policy. For example, some sections may need to be

translated or converted to images. Consider how your EDMF will translate in other countries and cultures.

Your EDMF will need to be approved by management, and it may need to be signed off by your governing body. High-level approval shows your EDMF is expected to be embedded in the culture of your organisation.

Step 6: Socialising and implementing your EDMF

The process of developing your EDMF may produce a list of recommendations for implementation. Over time, you may need to establish new systems and procedures; review your website and other current communications; amend your informed consent process set up new approvals and accountability processes; or establish new training modules.

It is important to consider how you will share your EDMF with key stakeholders. Your approach will vary depending on the nature of your operations. You might consider:

Staff, contractors, governing body members and volunteers:

- Ethical storytelling is explained as part of the interview process and included in your Staff Selection and Recruitment Policy
- Include relevant clauses in employment or engagement agreements, and your Staff Code of Conduct
- Key aspects of the EDMF and other relevant policies and procedures are included as part of induction training for new people and incorporated into regular training thereafter (e.g. part of an annual training package)
- Provide staff with easy access to key operational aspects of the policy (for example, include an EDMF one-pager on the staff intranet, on posters in the office, or as part of key internal controls, such as when uploading content to online databases).

Consultants and suppliers:

- Include relevant clauses in contracts with explanations of ethical storytelling
- Explain ethical storytelling to consultants as part of their engagement process

- Depending on the nature of their consultancy, consider providing consultants with some ethical storytelling training.

Implementing partners:

- Provide a copy of the EDMF at the outset of the relationship
- Where applicable, based on the relationship with the partner, provide training to key partner staff on the EDMF and your expectations.
- Include ethical storytelling requirements as part of any partner due diligence and communicate expectations
- Include ethical communications clauses as part of any contract and partnership agreements

Affiliates in international networks that receive funding:

- Include ethical storytelling clauses as part of any contracting and partnership agreements
- Provide a copy of the EDMF at the outset of the relationship and explain your expectations.

Donors that provide restricted funds:

- Provide a copy of the EDMF and other relevant policies (for example, your Communications Policy), including an explanation of applicable areas.

Supporters and the general public:

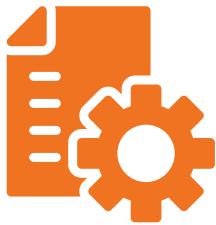
- Consider publishing your EDMF on your website.

Step 7: Monitoring and review

The EDMF should also have a set review schedule (e.g. every two years) to consider any updated regulations, learnings from incidents, stakeholder feedback and changed ways of working.

Consider creating an accountability framework for your EDMF and storytelling and publishing processes. You may choose to establish a working group, which regularly reviews your

processes, outcomes of content-gathering field trips and published content. You may also choose to create practical checklists for stakeholders who are involved in the storytelling and publishing process to ensure they understand their responsibilities, if these don't already exist.



Section 4

An example EDMF

Your organisation's Ethical Decision-Making Framework for Communications should be tailored to its needs. You can create a standalone Ethical Decision-Making Framework for Communications or you can add your EDMF to your existing Communications Policy. Both approaches are compliant with ACFID's Code of Conduct. The sections below are suggested elements to include in your EDMF.

Section A: Introduction

If you're creating a standalone Ethical Decision-Making Framework for Communications, it's useful to include an introduction. This could:

- explain what an EDMF is and why you need one
- outline the scope of the EDMF and who will be using it
- provide an overview of your organisation's values
- provide links to other relevant policies

An example is provided below. This should be adapted to reflect the expectations and approaches taken by your organisation.

EXAMPLE

At [organisation name], we aim to empower the communities we work with through our storytelling and communications content. We strive to empower and protect the people who share their stories with us. We are committed to depicting people and contexts authentically and truthfully. We value the importance of self-determination and are committed to working with all stakeholders in a way that upholds their dignity and respects their values, history, religion, language and culture.

Our vision is [vision]. We bring this vision to life by carefully protecting those who share their stories with us, and amplifying the benefits of sharing stories with our supporters and the general public.

[Organisation name] is a not-for-profit entity that [description of programming activities]. As part of our work, we share some important – yet difficult – stories. Sometimes our stories will show injustice and harsh realities. We, and the people we work with, know these are important stories for the world to hear. However, inherent in undertaking these activities is a level of risk in relation to sharing these stories.

We acknowledge it can be difficult to put our values into practice when sharing stories – especially stories dealing with trauma and injustice. We can face conflicting demands when collecting and sharing stories, and we acknowledge it's sometimes challenging to know exactly what 'dignity' and 'empowerment' mean in different cultural contexts. We also acknowledge that unconscious bias plays a huge part in decision making – however, by its very nature, it is difficult to address and mitigate the risks that it causes.

Misunderstanding cultural norms and mismanaging storytelling content can harm both the people we strive to support, as well as our organisation. For example, asylum seekers may be targeted for sharing stories about human rights abuses. Children may be targeted by people seeking to abuse them. The personal reputation and confidence of people who've shared their stories may be damaged if their stories are misused and they may face retribution from their community. Our organisation may suffer damage to our brand and reputation if we publish insensitive materials. These are just a few possible risks.

This EDMF is one element in a suite of tools to reduce these risks, as far as possible. We seek to prevent harm from occurring and this EDMF is a proactive means of mitigating those risks and supporting ethical decisions about our communications.

PURPOSE

This EDMF aims to ensure our communications content is of the highest ethical standard. This means all stakeholders are respected and protected, and trust in our organisational is maintained. The EDMF aims to ensure our organisation is using best-practice communications methods that minimise the risks related to storytelling and publishing.

SCOPE

This EDMF must be followed by everyone who collects and publishes stories at [organisation name], including all staff, volunteers, partner staff and governing body members. It includes our offices in Australia and in other countries managed by [organisation name]. The EDMF applies to visitors to our programs, and contractors and consultants such as freelance writers, designers, multimedia producers, fundraising consultants, partner organisations and other external parties using our stories, images, name or logo.

OUR VALUES

Everything our organisation does is built on our values. For our foundations to remain strong and for our actions to be ethical, we must continue to look to our values in our everyday work.

Ethical principles relating to the treatment of human beings are codified in a number of widely-accepted documents, such as the *Nuremberg Code* (1947), the United Nations' *Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), the *Declaration of Helsinki* (1964), the *Belmont Report* (1979), and the United Nations' *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (1979), *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2007) and *Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People* (2007).

At their core, these policies include the fundamental rights of human dignity, autonomy, protection, safety, maximisation of benefits and minimisation of harms. While originally stemming from biomedical and human rights contexts, these principles have been adapted beyond these early contexts and rise above disciplines and methodologies. We accept them as basic to any endeavour relating to storytelling ethics and they are explored in our EDMF.

[Organisation name's] values underpin our approach to storytelling:

[List your organisation's values and explain how they related to storytelling.]

Our values are aligned with the Australian Council for International Development's *Code of Conduct* and our EDMF is connected to other [organisation name] policies, including:

- Communications Policy
- Image Policy
- Child Safeguarding Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Risk Policy
- Disability Policy
- Gender Equality Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Staff Selection and Recruitment Policy
- Reconciliation Action Plan

Section B: Our Ethical Decision-Making Framework

This section is the heart of your EDMF. It should explain who's responsible for having the discussions outlined in the EDMF and at what point in the storytelling and publishing process they should occur. It should also include the topics and key questions that will be discussed and what to do if a decision can't be reached. We outline six key issues related to ethical storytelling that should be considered, but there may be others that are important to your organisation.

Making ethical decisions

This section introduces the concept of an Ethical Decision-Making Framework (EDMF) for Communications and explains its importance.

EXAMPLE

Our Ethical Decision-Making Framework (EDMF) for Communications explains how to make ethical decisions when creating and publishing communications content. It uses a framework of structured discussions at ethically important moments during the storytelling process, with the aim of creating focused discussions that improve practice. It also aims to reduce risks associated with storytelling and protect contributors.

Ethical decisions can be very complex. When a situation has no clear 'right and wrong' answer, decision making can be difficult. Even more difficult is making ethical decisions when affected by unconscious biases. And everyone holds unconscious biases.

More than one set of cultural norms and organisational values can equally apply to an issue, even if those norms and values are conflicting. This makes decisions difficult, as individuals and teams are forced to choose.

This EDMF sets out important questions and explains when these questions ought to be asked throughout the storytelling process. It also explains who is responsible for having these discussions and what to do if a decision can't be made.

Ambiguity and uncertainty are part of any ethical decision-making framework, and we encourage exploration of ethically grey areas. Indeed, this exploration is the most important part of the process. Our discussions help us to reach further outward, toward a fuller understanding of our contributors' lives and contexts – and also of our own unconscious biases, norms and ways of working.

Risk assessment

This section contains an overview of your organisation's **risk assessment** and explains how to apply it in your EDMF. The below is an example – yours should include detail specific to your organisation and refer to particular channels and audiences, depending on your organisation's operations.

EXAMPLE

In developing this EDMF, [organisation name] has considered the risks associated with all its communications activities and how they might impact on:

- Contributors and the communities in which we work
- Staff and volunteers across the organisation
- Governing body
- Our partners and contractors
- Supporters and the general public
- Overall activities of [organisation name]
- The reputation of [organisation name] and other ACFID members

The following on-going risks have been identified:

- [insert risks]

A more comprehensive communications risk log is updated as part of quarterly communications meetings and can be accessed here [link to relevant document].

This EDMF will be used to guide decision making across the organisation to help mitigate some of the risks mentioned above. It will be shared with partners who are involved in sourcing content for our communications materials, and training will be supplied where appropriate.

In addition, all of [Organisation name]'s communications activities related to humanitarian emergencies are considered high-risk and will therefore be subject to additional procedures outlined in the [Humanitarian Emergencies communications guidelines].

Who's talking to whom?

This section explains who you are expecting to contribute to the conversations in your EDMF.

EXAMPLE

While all staff, volunteers and members are responsible for ensuring our communications are ethical, **lawful** and **protect** contributors, some staff members will need to be involved in specific conversations as part of our EDMF. The staff involved in EDMF discussions are [list those positions as relevant to your organisation]:

Content gatherers: Including communications specialists, multimedia producers, writers and media relations staff, and their managers.

Programs: Including program staff and managers.

Child safeguarding: Including child safeguarding advisors and focal points.

Marketing: Including digital, marketing, fundraising and events, and their managers.

Ethically important moments

This section outlines the ‘ethically important’ moments in your storytelling process – i.e. when your EDMF might be used. It should explain which issues to discuss at these moments, and who’s responsible for discussing them. More information about each of the issues can be found in the next section, [Key Ethical Issues](#).

Remember – the following is an example only. It’s up to your organisation to decide who is involved at each point in time and how this process might be adapted for different pieces of communications.

1. When scoping a story

| WHEN | ISSUES TO DISCUSS | WHO |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Developing a storytelling conceptScoping story leadsWriting a Terms of Reference | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Connection to valuesProtection | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Content gatherersProgramsChild safeguardingMarketing |

2. When planning to gather content

| WHEN | ISSUES TO DISCUSS | WHO |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Planning a content-gathering tripPlanning a phone/email/video interviewSourcing content directly from program staff and contributors | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Informed consentFuzzy boundaries (a context analysis is helpful at this point)ProtectionPrivacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Content gatherersProgramsChild safeguarding |

3. While gathering content

| WHEN | ISSUES TO DISCUSS | WHO |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">While on a content-gathering tripWhile conducting an interview | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Informed consentFuzzy boundariesProtectionConnection to valuesPrivacyAuthorship and ownership | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Content gatherersProgramsChild safeguarding |

EXAMPLE

While all ethical issues should be considered throughout the storytelling process, there are times when certain issues are more important. Below are seven ‘ethically important’ moments during the storytelling and publishing process, accompanied by key issues to discuss at those times and who’s responsible for the discussions.

4. Directly after gathering content

| WHEN | ISSUES TO DISCUSS | WHO |
|---|--|--|
|  Directly after gathering content from the field or via an interview |  Informed consent Fuzzy boundaries Protection |  Informed consent Fuzzy boundaries Protection |

5. While creating the storytelling content

| WHEN | ISSUES TO DISCUSS | WHO |
|---|---|--|
|  While creating materials to publish, such as writing a story, editing videos/photos, and writing social media content |  Connection to values Authorship and ownership Fuzzy boundaries Privacy |  Content gatherers Programs Marketing |

6. When publishing a story

| WHEN | ISSUES TO DISCUSS | WHO |
|---|---|--|
|  When publishing content on social media and via the website, print (such as DMs) and the news media |  Connection to values Fuzzy boundaries (a context analysis is helpful at this point) Informed consent Protection Privacy Authorship and ownership |  Marketing Content gatherers Child safeguarding |

7. After publishing a story

| WHEN | ISSUES TO DISCUSS | WHO |
|--|--|--|
|  Once a story is in the public domain |  Informed consent Fuzzy boundaries Authorship and ownership |  Programs Content gatherers Marketing |

Key ethical issues

There are six key ethical issues that are relevant for our storytelling and publishing process. Below are some questions to help us reflect on and discuss these issues as part of the decision-making process. Some of these questions may be easy to answer. Others might not have a clear answer and are best considered in conversations with others, as outlined above.

EXAMPLE

These six ethical issues are most relevant for our storytelling and publishing process and should be discussed at the ethically important moments outlined above.

1. Connection to values

Everything [organisation name] does is built on our values. We must continue to look to our values in our everyday work so our foundations remain strong and our actions are ethical.

Our discussions should ask:

[Organisation name's] values

- [insert questions directly related to how your organisation's values affect your storytelling processes]

Human rights

- Have we put the best interests of the contributor first?
- Have we ensured we 'do no harm' to the contributor during the storytelling process?
- Have we treated the contributor with dignity and fairness?
- Have we respected the personal freedom and privacy of the contributor?
- Have we encouraged the contributor to freely express their thoughts and feelings?
- Have we given the contributor control over how their identity and thoughts are portrayed in their story?
- Have we ensured the content is accurate?

Children's rights

- Have we ensured the best interest of children have been put before the interests of adults and our organisation?
- Have we adequately protected children?
- Have we respected children's rights to dignity and fairness?
- Have we attempted to reduce stereotyping of children?
- Have we treated all children equally?

Women's rights

- Have we carefully considered how women are portrayed?
- Have we considered how sex-role stereotyping is portrayed?
- Have we given voice to women?
- Are we empowering girls and women through this story?
- Have we considered the unique protection needs of women in this story?

Disability rights

- Have we given people with disabilities the opportunity to contribute to this story?
- Have we considered how ableism has affected this story?
- Have we carefully considered how people with a disability are portrayed?
- When published, will this story be accessible to people with disabilities?

Indigenous rights

- Have we respected indigenous people's rights to dignity and fairness?
- Have we given indigenous people the ability to freely express themselves, through their own culture and language?
- Have we considered how racism has affected this story?
- Have we carefully considered how indigenous people are portrayed?
- Have we given indigenous people control over how their identity and thoughts are portrayed in their story?

2. Protection

[Organisation name] puts the wellbeing of its stakeholders first. We explain how we protect our stakeholders in our [Child Safeguarding Policy], [Image Policy], [Privacy Policy] and [Risk Policy]. All staff and stakeholders must uphold these policies. There are no exceptions. However, there are also context-related issues that arise in relation to **protection**. Our discussions should ask:

Protection of life

- Could the contributor's life be put at risk by sharing their story?
- Do we know enough about the contributor's history to make a confident assessment of their safety?

Protection of health

- Could the contributor's health be put at risk by sharing their story?
- Could the contributor risk being cut off from important services by sharing their story?

Protection of dignity

- Could we be putting the contributor or their community at risk of vilification or retribution by sharing their story?
- Have we considered how the contributor's family, friends and community might feel about the storytelling project?

3. Informed consent

[Organisation name's] informed consent process is clearly defined in [policy name]. All staff and stakeholders must follow this process. There are no exceptions. However, there are also context-specific issues that arise in relation to informed consent. Our discussions should ask:

Correct information

- Have we provided all the necessary information to the contributor so they can decide whether to consent to participate?
- Have we shown the contributor appropriate examples of how their story might be used (including where it may be published and who will see it)?
- Have we explained different ways the contributor's identity can be revealed and concealed?
- Have we consulted with the right people (including children's guardians and community elders)?

Clear comprehension

- Does the contributor fully understand the risks and opportunities associated with sharing and publishing their image and story with our organisation?
- Have we given the contributor enough advance notice about the project so they have time to consider the risks and opportunities?
- Have we explained the storytelling process in a way the contributor fully understands (including children), using the best-possible language?
- Is there a single point of contact for the contributor to discuss the project and any consent issues? Is it easy for the contributor to discuss the project with us?

Voluntary consent

- Is there a power imbalance between the contributor and the organisation?
- If there is a power imbalance, can you describe it?
- If there is a power imbalance, how can we reduce it?
- Is there an element of duress in the contributor's consent?

- If there is an element of duress, how can we address it?
- How can we ensure the contributor can say 'no' to being involved in the storytelling project?
- How can we ensure the contributor can withdraw their consent at any time?

4. Privacy

[Organisation name] values and upholds the privacy of their contributors. All staff, governing body members, partners and volunteers must abide by our [Privacy Policy]. However, there are also context-related issues that arise in relation to privacy. Our discussions should ask:

Protection

- Have we adequately protected the privacy of the contributor?
- Have we discussed how the contributor's story may expose them to the public?
- If appropriate, have we adequately concealed the name, location and visual identity of the contributor?

Information storage

- Have we safely and securely stored the contributor's personal information?
- Does the contributor understand how their personal information is stored and used?

Access to information

- Who has access to the contributor's information and are they aware of who can access it?
- Have we explained how the contributor can access their personal information, make amendments to their story and withdraw consent?

5. Authorship and ownership

We respect the right of contributors to control their stories. We respect the right of contracted writers and photographers to moral ownership of their works. And we acknowledge that ownership and 'control' of stories can raise difficult ethical questions. While we always abide by our [Privacy Policy], there are some discussions that can help us understand our responsibilities regarding authorship. Our discussions should ask:

Authorship

- How will contributors and content creators be acknowledged when publishing their stories?
- Does acknowledgement of authorship have implications for the privacy, anonymity or confidentiality assurances given to contributors?
- What ethical obligations do contributors and content creators have to the truthful representation of stories and data?

Copyright

- Who owns the copyright of our storytelling content?
- Are there any conflicting copyright claims for storytelling materials we've published (or seek to publish)?
- How do we ensure contributors and content creators understand their legal rights?

6. Fuzzy boundaries

We understand the storytelling process is built on relationships, and sometimes the network of relationships is complex. We acknowledge that relational boundaries between contributors, content collectors, program staff and others can become blurred. In addition, the stories they create may be used to serve multiple purposes, such as fundraising, advocacy, and community engagement. This blurring of roles and purposes is referred to as 'fuzzy boundaries'.

We acknowledge there is the potential for the content-collector role to become blurred in storytelling processes that involve building rapport with contributors. We also acknowledge that this potential is intensified in storytelling projects where content collectors spend significant periods of time engaged in fieldwork. Our discussions should ask:

Content-creator responsibilities

- How should we develop a relationship with the contributor?

- Should we explore how our **unconscious biases** affects this project? How might we change the storytelling process as a result of exploring our unconscious biases?
- What are the moral responsibilities that fall directly on the content collector?

Other people's responsibilities

- What are the different roles of those involved in the storytelling project?
- Does everyone in the project understand their role and others' expectations of them?
- How do different people involved in the project see the purpose of the storytelling project? If there are different perspectives, how do we manage any conflicts?

Blurred boundaries

- How do we respect the personal relationships (and possible friendships) developed during the project?
- How do we respond to any blurred roles and relationships during the course of the project?
- What impacts do blurred roles have on the ethical conduct of the project?
- Can content collectors, contributors or others become personally over-invested?

A few Golden Rules

You may want to create a few 'golden rules' to help your staff make ethical decisions.

EXAMPLE

During the entire storytelling and publishing process, keep

these three questions in mind:

1. If I share this story, will this person be safe?
2. If I share this story, will this person be empowered?
3. If I share this story, will this person feel respected – by themselves and others?

Who to talk to if you're still unsure

This section of your EDMF should outline the process staff and volunteers can take if they are unable to come to a decision after discussing the questions above. This should include contact information for other staff members who have expertise in a certain area, and information on how to escalate an issue if needed.

EXAMPLE

Making decisions about some of these issues can be difficult. There may be times when you or your team are still unsure

whether an image, story or information should be used even after discussing the key issues and reviewing other policies and guidelines. If you have discussed the questions outlined above and need more information to make a decision:

Contact the following people:

- Child safeguarding: [insert contact details]
- Protecting identities:
- Consent:

- Authorship and ownership:
- Privacy requirements:
- [insert others as required]

If you have discussed the questions outlined above, have all

the relevant information, but have not come to a decision, bring it to the attention of your manager.

The final decision on all communications materials lies with the CEO.

Section C: Definitions

You may want to include definitions so your stakeholders clearly understand your EDMF.

EXAMPLE

Content gatherer: Someone who documents a contributor's story via photographs, videos, oral interviews and written testimony.

Content: What stories are made of. Content can include copy, images, sound, video and data.

Contributor: Someone who shares their storytelling content with an organisation that intends to publish their content. In the context of not-for-profit organisations, contributors are usually program participants, staff, volunteers and members.

Copy: Written words and numbers.

Cultural norms: Informal understandings of group conduct that govern the behaviour of members of a society.

Dignity: The feeling of having decision-making power, freedom and autonomy over life choices, together with the feeling of self-worth and self-confidence, and feeling that one has the respect of others.

Empowerment: Authority or power given to someone to do something.

Ethical decision-making framework: A structured series of questions and issues for consideration that help people make choices when they are faced with situations that require value judgements.

Ethical dilemma: A situation that has no clear right or wrong answer.

Images: Two-dimensional visual representations. Images include 'still' images such as photographs, artworks and illustrations, and 'moving' images such as videos, animations and GIFs.

Informed consent: When a contributor grants permission to publish their story with full knowledge of the possible consequences, including possible risks and benefits. Informed consent must be granted without duress.

Privacy: A person's right to control access to their information and identity.

Publisher: A person or organisation that publishes stories using methods such as print, websites, social media, press releases etc.

Respect: Due regard for the feelings, wishes or rights of others.

Story: A story can include written, visual, verbal and data elements. These elements can exist alone or in a combination with other story elements.

Storytelling: The act of sharing stories.

Unconscious bias: A bias we are unaware of, and which happens outside of our control. It is a bias that happens automatically and is triggered by our brain making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations. It is influenced by our cultural environment and personal experiences.

Vicarious trauma: The inner transformation that occurs in the inner experience of the therapist [or other professional] that comes about as a result of empathic engagement with clients' trauma material. (Pearlman and Saakvitne, 1995)

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Section 5

Code of Conduct requirements

Ethical communications fall under several Quality Principles in the Code of Conduct. The relevant sections are:

6. Communication

Quality principle: Development and humanitarian organisations communicate truthfully and ethically

Commitment 6.2

We collect and use information ethically.

Compliance Indicator 6.2.1

Members' communications are accurate, respectful, and protect privacy and dignity.

The Verifier for this Compliance Indicator requires Members to have:

An ethical decision-making framework, which must:

- Align with the values of their organisation and this Code.
- Commit the organisation to the use of images and messages in communications in a way that portrays the affected people in a manner that respects their dignity, values, history, religion, language and culture, and is authentic to the context, person and terms of consent given
- Be consistent with ACFID's Fundraising Charter (8.1.2)
- Be consistent with the Members' privacy policy (7.2.2).

8. Resource Management

Quality principle: Development and humanitarian organisations acquire, manage and report on resources ethically and responsibly.

Commitment 8.1

We source our resources ethically.

Compliance Indicator 8.1.2

Members report their compliance with the [ACFID Fundraising Charter](#) annually to their own governing body.

The Verifier for this Compliance Indicator requires that:

- Members have a clear ethical decision-making framework in place which aligns with the values of their organisation and the Code and includes:
 - A commitment to portraying affected people in a way that respects their dignity, values, history, religion, language and culture.
 - A process that integrates a range of key staff in the organisation (e.g. communications, planning, child protection and CEO) in decision-making where appropriate.
 - Clear responsibilities for approval for public use of images and messages.
 - A process which recognises and balances both donors and affected people but which gives primacy to the primary stakeholders.

Other ACFID Code of Conduct principles that support ethical communications:

Quality Principle 1. Rights, protection and inclusion

Development and humanitarian responses respect and protect human rights and advance inclusion.

1.1.2 Members contribute to the realisation of human rights in their development and humanitarian initiatives.

1.1.3 Members protect primary stakeholders from discrimination, violence, abuse, exploitation or neglect based on an analysis of the context in which they are working.

1.2.4 Members consider the potential impact of their development and humanitarian initiatives on those who are vulnerable and those who are affected by marginalisation and exclusion with a view to preventing unintended harm.

1.4.2 Members have a code of conduct that advances child safeguarding behaviours and applies to all personnel, partners and project visitors.

Quality Principle 2. Participation, empowerment & local ownership

Development and humanitarian responses enable sustainable change through the empowerment of local actors and systems.

2.2.2 Members promote opportunities for primary stakeholders to participate in decision-making about the initiatives that affect them.

2.3.3 Members promote opportunities for those marginalised due to their gender, in particular women and girls, to participate in decision-making.

2.4.3 Members promote opportunities for people with disabilities and/or their representative organisations to participate in decision-making.

Quality Principle 4. Quality and Effectiveness

Development and humanitarian organisations and responses are informed by evidence, planning, assessment and learning.

4.2.2 Members assess and manage risk in their development and humanitarian initiatives.

Quality Principle 6. Communication

Development and humanitarian organisations communicate truthfully and ethically.

6.1.1 Members' public materials accurately describe the organisation and its work.

6.2.2 Members have organisational requirements for the collection of information, images, and stories.

6.2.3 Members are respectful and considerate of the reputation of other ACFID Members.

Quality Principle 7. Governance

Development and humanitarian organisations are governed in an accountable, transparent and responsible way.

7.2.2 Members have organisation-wide requirements for the protection of privacy.

7.3.2 Member development initiatives consistently demonstrate the separation of development activities from non-development activities

Quality Principle 9. People and culture

Development and humanitarian organisations manage and support their people fairly and effectively.

9.4.1 Members specify the expectation of professional conduct of all staff and volunteers.



Section 6

Useful information on EDMFs

Codes of ethics

Association of Internet Researchers. *Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee (Version 2.0)*. 2012.

Australian Community Managers. *Code of Ethics*. Sydney, 2017.

Australian Council for International Development. *Code of Conduct*. Canberra, 2017.

Cox, S. Drew, S. Guillemin, M. Howell, C. Warr, D. and Waycott, J. *Guidelines for Ethical Visual Research Methods*. The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2014.

Dochas. *Code of Conduct on Images and Messages*. Dublin, 2006.

Fundraising Institute of Australia. *Fundraising Institute of Australia Code*. 2018.

Photovoice. *Statement of Ethical Practice*.

StoryCentre. *Ethical Practice*.

Best-practice toolkits

Crompton, Tom and Netta Weinstein. *Common Cause Communication: A toolkit for charities*. Common Cause Foundation, London, 2015.

Dochas. *The illustrative guide to the Dochas Code of Conduct on images and messaging*. Dublin, 2014.

Shenker-Osorio, Anat & Centre for Community Change. *Messaging this Moment: A handbook for progressive communicators*. Washington, DC, 2017.

Victoria Law Foundation. *When I tell my story, I'm in charge: Ethical and effective storytelling in advocacy*. Melbourne, 2013.

Using images ethically

Aufderheide, Pat, Peter Jaszi and Mridu Chandra. *Honest Truths: Documentary Filmmakers on Ethical Challenges in Their Work*. Centre for Media and Social Impact, Washington, DC, 2009.

Hardy, Pip. "First do no harm: developing an ethical process of consent and release for digital storytelling in healthcare". Seminar.net - International journal of media, technology and lifelong learning Vol. 11, Issue 3 (2015).

Wang, Caroline C. "Photovoice Ethics: Perspectives from Flint Photovoice". *Health Education & Behavior*, Vol. 28 (5): 560-572 (October 2001).

Wang, Caroline C. "Youth Participation in Photovoice as a Strategy for Community Change." *Journal of Community Practice* (The Haworth Press, Inc.) Vol. 14, No. 1/2, 2006, pp. 147-161.

Warrington, Siobhan and Jess Crombie. *The People in the Pictures*. Save the Children United Kingdom, London, 2017.

Wehbi, Samantha and Deane Taylor. "Photographs speak louder than words: the language of international development images." *Community Development Journal* 48, no. 4 (2013): 525-539.

Aid and development

Common Cause. *No cause is an island: How people are influenced by values regardless of the cause*. Common Cause Foundation, London, 2014.

Darnton, Andrew and Martin Kirk. *Finding Frames: New ways to engage the UK public in global poverty*. Bond for International Development, London, 2011.

Moreton, Emily. *Images in online fundraising and marketing: A critical examination of ACFID Members' practice and perspectives*. Australian Council for International Development, Canberra, 2018.

Dush, Lisa. "The ethical complexities of sponsored digital storytelling initiatives". *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16(6): 627-640 (2012).

Muller, Sachini and Terence Wood. "Aid online: an analysis of how Australian aid NGOs use the internet". ANU Development Centre Discussion Paper No. 47. ANU Development Policy Centre, Canberra, 2016.

Orgad, Shani. "Visualizers of solidarity: organizational politics in humanitarian and international development NGOs." *Visual Communication* 12, no. 3 (2013): 295-314.

Seu, I.B. & Orgad, S. *Mediated Humanitarian Knowledge: Audiences' reactions and moral actions*. Final Report. University of London, London, 2014.

ACFID and DFAT

Australian Council for International Development, *Code of Conduct & Quality Assurance Framework* (2017)

Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Child Protection Guidance Note: Use of Images and Social Media* (2017)

Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Child Protection Policy* (2017)

Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Consent for use of images/videos* (date unknown)

Codes of ethics for research

British Sociological Association. *Statement of Ethical Practice*. London, 2017.

Ivy, Andrew and Leo Alexander. *The Nuremberg Code*. United States Counsel for War Crimes, 1947.

National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, The. *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*. United States Department of Health,

Education, and Welfare. 1979.

National Health and Medical Research Council, The; The Australian Research Council and Universities Australia. *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. 2007 (updated 2018).

World Medical Association. *Declaration of Helsinki: Ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects*. Helsinki, 1964. (Last updated: Brazil, 2013.)

Relevant United Nations conventions and declarations

United Nations, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (1979)

Article 2 – Women have the right to not be discriminated against on the basis of their sex.

Article 5 – Sex-role stereotyping and prejudice is harmful to women and girls.

Article 7 – Women have the right to participate in political and public life.

Article 13 – Women have equal rights to participate in recreational activities, sports and all aspects of cultural life.

rights and freedoms set out in the Convention.

Article 7 – The best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children with disability.

Article 8 – Countries must raise awareness of the rights, capabilities and contributions of people with disability.

Article 21 – People with disability have the right to express themselves, including the freedom to give and receive information and ideas through all forms of communication, including through accessible formats and technologies, sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, mass media and all other accessible means of communication.

Article 30 – People with disability have the right to take part in cultural life on an equal basis with others, including access to cultural materials, performances and services, and to recreational, leisure and sporting activities.

United Nations, *Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People* (2007)

Article 3 – Indigenous people have the right to self-determination.

Article 8 – Indigenous people have the right to preserve their culture. They should not be forced to assimilate to the culture of colonisers or subjected to racial discrimination.

Article 11 – Indigenous people have the right to practise their culture, including visual and performing arts and literature.

Article 15 – Indigenous people have the right to dignity, respect and diversity of culture.

Article 16 – Indigenous people have the right to expression in the media, including in their own languages.

Article 18 – Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making through representatives chosen by them.

United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2007)

Article 6 – Countries must take all appropriate measures to ensure that women with disability are able to fully enjoy the

**United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*
(1948)**

Article 1 – All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Article 2 – Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Article 3 – Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 5 – No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 12 – No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with their privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon their honour and reputation.

Article 19 – Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

Article 27 – Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which they are the author.



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ACFID unites Australia's non-government aid and international development organisations to strengthen their collective impact against poverty

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