



Corporation  
for Public  
Broadcasting

## **Corporation for Public Broadcasting Request for Proposals**

### **White Paper on Best Practices in Assessing Objectivity and Balance**

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**Release Date:** October 22, 2007  
**Closing Date:** November 16, 2007 at 5:00 PM (Eastern Time)

**Please submit proposals electronically on or before the closing date. CPB reserves the right to reject proposals that are submitted after the closing date.**

## 1. Overview

The methodology and practice of analyzing the content of news and public affairs programming is a mature and tested practice. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (“CPB”) is seeking proposals to conduct research regarding objectivity and balance in broadcasting and to develop a publishable quality white paper (“White Paper”) which will review existing methods, with a particular focus on empirical methodologies that provide programming assessments in a scientifically rigorous manner.

This White Paper will assist CPB in its statutory obligation regarding “objectivity and balance” in relation to the evaluation of publicly-funded programming. The findings will be presented to the CPB Board of Directors, and may be discussed at a colloquium on objectivity and balance planned for early 2008.

## 2. Background

The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 (“PBA”) mandates that CPB is responsible for the full development of a public broadcasting system that makes available programs of “high quality, diversity, creativity, excellence, and innovation,” and that are “obtained from diverse sources.”<sup>1</sup> The PBA also directs that all programs (and program series) of a controversial nature must be made available “with strict adherence to objectivity and balance.” The Public Telecommunications Act of 1992 expands on the PBA, and charges CPB’s Board of Directors with establishing a “comprehensive policy and set of procedures,” that, among other things, provide for regular review of national public broadcasting programming for objectivity and balance.<sup>2</sup>

While fostering objectivity and balance in programming, CPB must also assure that public broadcasters and organizations involved in producing, acquiring or distributing programs have maximum freedom from interference with, or control of, program content. This role as a “firewall” - ensuring public service media’s independence from politics - must be taken into account when considering how to determine definitions of “objectivity and balance” and the establishing of any review thereof. Because the PBA prohibits CPB from producing, scheduling or disseminating programs on its own, CPB must meet its objectivity and balance mandate through other statutorily authorized functions related to programming, such as funding, research, training, and communication.

CPB has engaged in specific activities to address balance and objectivity mandate in the past, including:

- In September 1994, CPB funded the development of *Decisions...Decisions...: A Guide to Developing Standards of Editorial Integrity and Responsibility for Public Broadcasting Stations*. The guide was developed by the College of Journalism

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<sup>1</sup> 47 U.S.C. 396, Subpart D (g)(1)(A).

<sup>2</sup> P.L. 102-356, Section 19.

and Mass Communications at the University of South Carolina. It was the result of a survey of station practices, a colloquy comprising individuals from academe, the media, and public broadcasting, and development of a resource bibliography of books and articles on editorial integrity and responsibility. The guide was designed to serve as a point of reference for stations to use in creating their own guidelines or standards of editorial integrity and responsibility.<sup>3</sup>

- In 1995, CPB funded a conference on Public Radio Journalism and the creation of *Independence and Integrity: A Guidebook for Public Radio Journalism*, a practical guide for developing journalistic standards. It included checklists, case studies, discussions of differing standards, and recommendations of books and manuals.<sup>4</sup>
- From 2002 to 2004, CPB funded workshops organized by Best Practices in Journalism, to raise awareness of editorial integrity and objectivity and balance issues in programming.
- In January 2004, CPB and National Public Radio (“NPR”) issued the updated guidebook *Independence and Integrity II: The Updated Ethics Guide for Public Radio Journalism* which was designed to assist public radio journalists who regularly confront difficult editorial and ethical choices.<sup>5</sup>
- On April 5, 2005, by resolution of the CPB Board of Directors, the CPB Office of the Ombudsmen was established.<sup>6</sup>

In November of 2005, CPB’s Office of Inspector General (“OIG”) determined that CPB had not done enough to fulfill the established Congressional mandates. The OIG’s *Report of Review* points out the challenge CPB management faces:

It is...important to understand CPB’s complex and sometimes contradictory role in carrying out its responsibility to act as a “heat shield,” to prevent political interference, and to address objectivity and balance issues in public broadcasting programming. The 1978 amendments to the PBA prohibited CPB from producing programs, scheduling programs for dissemination, or disseminating programs to the public.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A copy of the guide can be found at: [http://www.cpb.org/aboutcpb/goals/objectivity/Decisions\\_Decisions\\_1994\\_Guide\\_to\\_Developing\\_Standards\\_of\\_Editorial\\_Integrity.pdf](http://www.cpb.org/aboutcpb/goals/objectivity/Decisions_Decisions_1994_Guide_to_Developing_Standards_of_Editorial_Integrity.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> A copy of *Independence and Integrity: A Guidebook for Public Radio Journalism* can be found at: [http://www.cpb.org/stations/reports/cpb\\_pubradio\\_ethicsGuideI.pdf](http://www.cpb.org/stations/reports/cpb_pubradio_ethicsGuideI.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> The updated guidebook can be found at [http://www.cpb.org/stations/reports/cpb\\_pubradio\\_ethicsGuideII.pdf](http://www.cpb.org/stations/reports/cpb_pubradio_ethicsGuideII.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> The text of the resolution can be found at: <http://www.cpb.org/aboutcpb/leadership/board/resolutions/resolution.php?prn=463>

<sup>7</sup> CPB Office of Inspector General, REPORT OF REVIEW, Review of Alleged Actions Violating The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, as Amended [Report No. EPB503-602, November 15, 2005], p. 4.

The OIG laid out what it considered to be the clear intent of Congress:

The Senate floor debate on June 2, 1992...required...CPB to not rely solely on public comments to assess objectivity and balance, but to also conduct their own reviews of national programming on a regular basis.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding this subject, Senator Inouye said:

[it] is intended to assure that, to the extent that the Board identifies... areas in which the Corporation could do more [to] facilitate the full development of public telecommunications, it takes those areas into account in awarding certain programming grants . . . . For example, if the Board's review of national public broadcasting programming or its analysis of public comments reveal a dearth of programs on a particular issue, from a particular perspective, or serving a particular audience, the Board can direct the Corporation to solicit proposals or fund programs under these program funds that will fill the hole or correct the imbalance..."<sup>9</sup>

The OIG concluded in its *Report of Review* that "when the Board finds a lack of objectivity and balance in national programming the Board can direct CPB management to take action to fund balancing programs." Consequently, the OIG recommended that CPB's Board

[e]stablish formal policies and procedures for conducting regular reviews of national programming for objectivity and balance. This policy should be developed in conjunction with all significant stakeholders in the public broadcasting community to ensure transparency and agreement on the criteria to be used to evaluate objectivity and balance.<sup>10</sup>

As a part of CPB's effort to address the OIG's recommendation, CPB consulted with the deans of the nation's top schools of journalism as well as with public broadcasters including NPR and the Public Broadcasting Service ("PBS"). This consultation with the journalism deans and the public broadcasters will continue as CPB develops its response to the OIG.

This White Paper is expected to be a series of seven (collectively, "the White Papers"). The other topics of the series will include:

- Objectivity and Balance: Conceptual and Practical History in American Journalism
- Objectivity and Balance: Today's Best Practices in American Journalism
- Objectivity and Balance: How Do Readers and Viewers of News and Information Reach Conclusions Regarding Fairness and Balance?
- Public Media: Journalism When Government Supports the Enterprise

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<sup>8</sup> REPORT OF REVIEW, p. 5

<sup>9</sup> See *Congressional Record*, June 2, 1992, p. S. 7342.

<sup>10</sup> REPORT OF REVIEW, p. 37

- Concepts in Tension: the Challenge of Ensuring Both Objectivity and Balance and Editorial Independence
- Expectations for Objectivity and Balance in Multi-Platform Distribution - Traditional and New Media

CPB plans to integrate the findings of these white papers as it continues to respond to the Inspector General's *Report*.

### **3. Project Deliverables**

The primary deliverable for this project is a White Paper on the topic of (and to be named) "Best Practices in Assessing Objectivity and Balance", which should include the following:

- Review of the current methodologies used to provide qualitative assessments of news and public affairs programming.
- Review of the academic literature related to news and public affairs programming qualitative assessments, including content analysis and similar practices.
- Review and discussion of the typical criteria and/or indicators that are used in conducting qualitative programming assessments.
- Review and discussion of current practices that help to assess issues related to objectivity and balance.<sup>11</sup>
- Review and discussion of appropriate criteria (existing or new) and/or indicators that could be used to evaluate the objectivity and balance of news and public affairs programming.
- Discussion of how qualitative assessments could specifically be applied in meeting the concerns of CPB's Inspector General related to monitoring news and public affairs programming aired on public media.

### **4. Qualifications**

Interested individuals wishing to respond to this RFP should have an extensive journalism background. Preference will be given to those who are currently involved in academia, as in a journalism school or department, and those who are analysts and scholars for policy institutes focusing on the media and journalism standards.

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<sup>11</sup> References to "objectivity and balance" should be broadly defined to include related issues such as editorial integrity, editorial standards, fairness, accuracy, transparency, and accountability.

## 5. Budget

The grant for this project will be in the amount of \$12,500. This is non-negotiable, and is inclusive of all expenses.

The selected grantee for this project will receive 50% of the grant amount upon signing a negotiated grant agreement, and the balance will be delivered upon receipt of the **completed**, approved White Paper.

## 6. How to Respond

Responses to this RFP must include the following:

- Name of chosen topic clearly indicated in the title;
- Description of how research will be approached and presented;
- Statement of qualifications of applicant;
- Resume(s) of all personnel involved in the Project; and
- Three references (familiar with applicant's research, analysis and drafting/communication work).

Applicants should know that the final product (White Paper) **must** include the following:

- A complete bibliography; and
- A list of other relevant resources on the topic covered, including web sites, blogs, professional organizations, and conference proceedings.

The White Paper must be submitted in PDF and MSWord formats.

CPB reserves the right to request additional clarification of the content and references in the White Paper and may edit the White Paper for purposes of publication or presentation.

CPB is the sole owner of the White Paper.

Applicants may respond to the RFPs for the other white paper topics.

## 7. Proposal Submission

Proposals for this Project are due to CPB no later than November 16, **2007, at 5:00 p.m. EST.**

The awards are scheduled to be announced by December 7, 2007.

## **8. Timeframe**

A first draft of the White Paper is due 60 days after execution of a signed contract between the selected applicant and CPB.

The final White Paper must be completed and delivered to CPB 75 days after execution of a signed contract between the selected applicant and CPB.

The findings of the White Paper may be included in a CPB sponsored colloquium planned for early 2008. The author(s) of this White Paper may be invited to participate in this colloquium, exact date and location to be determined.

## **9. Proposal Policies**

CPB is not responsible for loss or damage to the material submitted by any applicant. Any submission to CPB shall become the property of CPB (not including any intellectual property rights contained in such submission), and CPB is not required to return any submitted materials to any applicant. CPB is not responsible for any violation of copyright, trademark, patent, trade secret, or other rights that may result from disclosure made by response to this RFP.

Solicitation by CPB of proposals does not constitute an agreement by CPB to extend funding to any party for the project under consideration. CPB may, in its sole discretion, elect not to pursue this project in any manner.

By submitting a proposal, each applicant grants to CPB the right to duplicate, use, disclose, and distribute all of the materials submitted for purposes of evaluation, review, and research. In addition, each applicant guarantees that the applicant has full and complete rights to all of the information and materials included in the proposal. Each applicant also guarantees that all such materials are not defamatory and do not infringe upon or violate the privacy rights, copyrights, or other proprietary rights of any third party.

## **10. Conditions of Agreement**

If a proposal is selected for funding, applicants will be required to sign a binding agreement. Until the selected applicant and CPB have signed an agreement, no express or implied commitment has been made to provide financial support to the Project or to the selected applicant. Applicants are not authorized to commence work until the agreement is fully executed. If a selected applicant opts to commence work,

they do so at their own risk. No oral or written statement other than the signed, written agreement will govern or modify the relationship between the applicant and CPB.

The selected applicant must be able to comply with a number of requirements that will be included in the operative agreement. These requirements include but are not limited to:

- A. Representations and warranties that, among other things, any work undertaken by consultant on behalf of CPB shall be non-defamatory and shall not violate or infringe upon the privacy rights, copyrights, or other proprietary rights of any third party;
- B. Covenant to indemnify CPB against any loss resulting from breach of any of the guarantees contained in the agreement.
- C. Covenant to maintain, during the term of the agreement and for a period of three years thereafter: (i) all financial records related to the services provided, which records shall be accessible to CPB, and to the U.S. Comptroller General or other representatives for examination and audit purposes; and (ii) a complete file of all subcontracts and other agreements, licenses, clearances, and other relevant documents related to the work undertaken. In addition, ensure that any subcontractors or consultants it employs for services relating to the agreement also maintain such records for the period specified and under the same terms.
- D. Compliance with equal employment opportunity and nondiscrimination laws and policies;
- E. Documentation as to actual costs, and provide supporting detail demonstrating that all costs are reasonable, necessary and allocable to the requirements and objectives of the work undertaken; and
- F. All research and materials created, developed, compiled or produced pursuant to or as a result of this project (including but not limited to all reports) will be considered ordered and commissioned by CPB as works made for hire under the copyright laws, and made in the course of services rendered. CPB will have sole and exclusive rights to all reports and other deliverables under the agreement.

Other material terms and provisions will be set forth in the documents provided to the applicant that successfully completes the selection process.