

Public Records Resources

1. Police Reports

Contact the local police department where the crime occurred to request incident reports. Many states have public access laws (FOIA or equivalent) that allow you to obtain these records. Records for records may be available online; you'll need to check for each police department. In some cases you can also get 9-1-1 calls and arrest records.

For Denver:

<https://www.denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directory/Police-Department/Police-Records>

2. Court Records

PACER: for federal cases and bankruptcy cases. <https://pacer.uscourts.gov/>

And state court websites also offer access to court filings, transcripts, and case dockets.

For Colorado:

<https://www.cocourts.com/cocourts/>

Clerk of Courts Office: Visit the local courthouse to access physical or electronic records related to cases. Clerks are there to help you. It's okay to admit you need help finding resources. They can also help you look up case numbers, which is the key to then locating documents.

3. Arrest Records and Jail Logs

Colorado has a service through the Colorado Bureau of Investigation where you can search all arrests of someone in Colorado that costs \$6: <https://www.cbirecordscheck.com/Index.aspx?CLS=N>

Local Sheriff's Office: In many places, current and past arrest records can be accessed through sheriff's office websites or in person.

Department of Corrections Websites: These sites often provide information on incarcerated individuals, including sentences and parole details.

For state of Colorado: <https://www.doc.state.co.us/oss/>

For Federal Prisons: <https://www.bop.gov/inmateloc/>

4. Property Records and Deeds

County Assessor's Office: Property ownership details can reveal key information about locations tied to a case.

For Denver: <https://www.denvergov.org/property>

Public Land Records: These may show changes in property ownership or use over time.

Public Records Resources

In Denver, pre-1988 chain of title are available through the public library.

5. Business and LLC registrations

Secretary of State websites. You can often find the registrations for LLCs and corporations through the business services pages of SoS websites. Some states let you search by registered agent name, but some do not. This can be helpful in discerning who might own a specific business entity, or to look up all business entities owned by a specific person. But it can become a rabbit hole when individuals deploy shell companies, or use mail drop services as registered agents.

In Colorado, the search page for this is here: <https://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/business/businessHome.html>

CODE of ETHICS

PREAMBLE

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. Ethical journalism strives to ensure the free exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough. An ethical journalist acts with integrity. The Society declares these four principles as the foundation of ethical journalism and encourages their use in its practice by all people in all media.

SEEK TRUTH AND REPORT IT

Ethical journalism should be accurate and fair. Journalists should be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

Journalists should:

- ▶ Take responsibility for the accuracy of their work. Verify information before releasing it. Use original sources whenever possible.
- ▶ Remember that neither speed nor format excuses inaccuracy.
- ▶ Provide context. Take special care not to misrepresent or oversimplify in promoting, previewing or summarizing a story.
- ▶ Gather, update and correct information throughout the life of a news story.
- ▶ Be cautious when making promises, but keep the promises they make.
- ▶ Identify sources clearly. The public is entitled to as much information as possible to judge the reliability and motivations of sources.
- ▶ Consider sources' motives before promising anonymity. Reserve anonymity for sources who may face danger, retribution or other harm, and have information that cannot be obtained elsewhere. Explain why anonymity was granted.
- ▶ Diligently seek subjects of news coverage to allow them to respond to criticism or allegations of wrongdoing.
- ▶ Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information unless traditional, open methods will not yield information vital to the public.
- ▶ Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable. Give voice to the voiceless.
- ▶ Support the open and civil exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- ▶ Recognize a special obligation to serve as watchdogs over public affairs and government. Seek to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open, and that public records are open to all.
- ▶ Provide access to source material when it is relevant and appropriate.
- ▶ Boldly tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience. Seek sources whose voices we seldom hear.
- ▶ Avoid stereotyping. Journalists should examine the ways their values and experiences may shape their reporting.
- ▶ Label advocacy and commentary.
- ▶ Never deliberately distort facts or context, including visual information. Clearly label illustrations and re-enactments.
- ▶ Never plagiarize. Always attribute.

MINIMIZE HARM

Ethical journalism treats sources, subjects, colleagues and members of the public as human beings deserving of respect.

Journalists should:

- ▶ Balance the public's need for information against potential harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance or undue intrusiveness.

- ▶ Show compassion for those who may be affected by news coverage. Use heightened sensitivity when dealing with juveniles, victims of sex crimes, and sources or subjects who are inexperienced or unable to give consent. Consider cultural differences in approach and treatment.
- ▶ Recognize that legal access to information differs from an ethical justification to publish or broadcast.
- ▶ Realize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than public figures and others who seek power, influence or attention. Weigh the consequences of publishing or broadcasting personal information.
- ▶ Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity, even if others do.
- ▶ Balance a suspect's right to a fair trial with the public's right to know. Consider the implications of identifying criminal suspects before they face legal charges.
- ▶ Consider the long-term implications of the extended reach and permanence of publication. Provide updated and more complete information as appropriate.

ACT INDEPENDENTLY

The highest and primary obligation of ethical journalism is to serve the public.

Journalists should:

- ▶ Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived. Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- ▶ Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and avoid political and other outside activities that may compromise integrity or impartiality, or may damage credibility.
- ▶ Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; do not pay for access to news. Identify content provided by outside sources, whether paid or not.
- ▶ Deny favored treatment to advertisers, donors or any other special interests, and resist internal and external pressure to influence coverage.
- ▶ Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two. Prominently label sponsored content.

BE ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT

Ethical journalism means taking responsibility for one's work and explaining one's decisions to the public.

Journalists should:

- ▶ Explain ethical choices and processes to audiences. Encourage a civil dialogue with the public about journalistic practices, coverage and news content.
- ▶ Respond quickly to questions about accuracy, clarity and fairness.
- ▶ Acknowledge mistakes and correct them promptly and prominently. Explain corrections and clarifications carefully and clearly.
- ▶ Expose unethical conduct in journalism, including within their organizations.
- ▶ Abide by the same high standards they expect of others.

The SPJ Code of Ethics is a statement of abiding principles supported by additional explanations and position papers (at spj.org) that address changing journalistic practices. It is not a set of rules, rather a guide that encourages all who engage in journalism to take responsibility for the information they provide, regardless of medium. The code should be read as a whole; individual principles should not be taken out of context. It is not, nor can it be under the First Amendment, legally enforceable.

Trauma-Informed Reporting Cheat Sheet

1. Understand Trauma and Its Effects

- **Know the Basics of Trauma:** Recognize that trauma can stem from various experiences, including violence, loss, PTSD, abuse, and disasters. It affects people differently based on factors like past experiences, support systems, and resilience.
- **Anticipate Triggers:** Be mindful that certain questions, words, or visuals can trigger emotional responses in trauma survivors.

2. Prioritize Informed Consent

- **Explain the Process:** Let interviewees know what the interview will entail, including the possibility of their story being shared publicly.
- **Allow for Withdrawal:** Give them permission to stop the interview or decline certain questions, even if they initially agreed to participate.

3. Be Mindful of Power Dynamics

- **Establish Trust and Rapport:** Approach the interview with humility and patience, acknowledging any power imbalance.
- **Give Them Agency:** Empower survivors by offering choices, like where to conduct the interview and when to pause.

4. Use Sensitive Language

- **Avoid Sensationalism:** Frame questions and narrative elements in a way that doesn't re-traumatize or exploit the interviewee's experience.
- **Validate Their Experience:** Avoid language that questions the validity of their feelings or memory. Respect their story as they tell it.

5. Practice Empathetic Listening

- **Focus on the Interviewee:** Stay engaged and avoid interrupting. Maintain eye contact and give them time to express themselves fully.
- **Reflect and Clarify:** Show you're listening by summarizing or clarifying points they've made, which also ensures accuracy.

6. Avoid Details That Could Be Re-Traumatic

- **Minimize Graphic Descriptions:** Avoid prompting for details that aren't necessary for the story, especially those that could reignite trauma.
- **Respect Boundaries:** If an interviewee signals discomfort, don't push for further details. Respect their limits.

7. Acknowledge Emotional Impact

- **Be Transparent About Possible Reactions:** Let the interviewee know it's normal to feel emotional or experience flashbacks.
- **Offer Support Resources:** Be ready to suggest mental health resources, hotlines, or support services if they're needed.

8. Check Your Story's Tone and Framing

- **Avoid Stigmatizing Language:** Frame the story with compassion, not sensationalism or pity.
- **Highlight Resilience, Not Just Trauma:** Focus on the survivor's resilience and strengths, not just their trauma. Avoid reducing them to their traumatic experience.

Key Reminders:

- **Above all, do no harm:** Let this principle guide your questions, tone, and approach.
- **Respect the dignity and humanity of trauma survivors:** This should be central in all interactions and storytelling choices.

For a much more in-depth guide, see the DART Center for Journalism and Trauma

<https://dartcenter.org/resources/dart-center-style-guide>