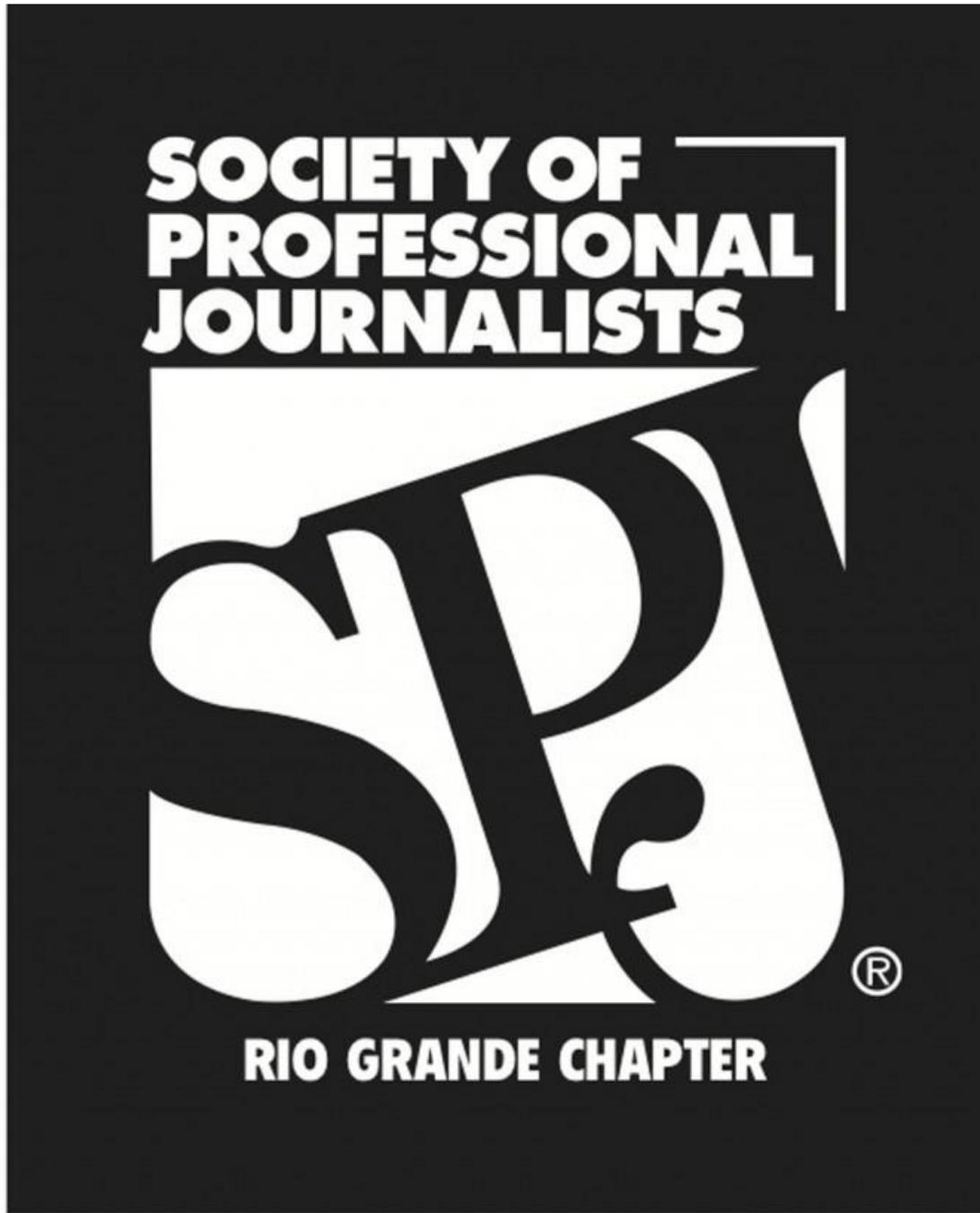


# **Tips & Tools for New Mexico Journalists**



This resource guide for New Mexico journalists comes to you courtesy of the Rio Grande Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ).

SPJ is the nation's most broad-based journalism organization, dedicated to encouraging the free practice of journalism and stimulating high standards of ethical behavior. Founded in 1909 as Sigma Delta Chi, SPJ promotes the free flow of information vital to a well-informed citizenry through the daily work of its nearly 10,000 members; works to inspire and educate current and future journalists through professional development; and protects First Amendment guarantees of freedom of speech and press through its advocacy efforts.

The Rio Grande Chapter was reorganized in 2009 after a lengthy hiatus and is dedicated to becoming a force in our state for responsible journalism in all media. We represent practitioners from print, broadcasting, corporate communications, and online “new media.” We welcome writers, reporters, editors, photographers, producers, on-air talent, commentators, and communicators of all kinds who recognize the value of membership in an organization that holds the profession to strict ethical guidelines while standing up for First Amendment rights. The chapter territory includes all of New Mexico and the El Paso region of Texas.

Throughout the year, the Rio Grande Chapter offers training programs and social events—all of which are meant to encourage excellent journalism in New Mexico and nurture a sense of camaraderie among the state's reporters.

Visit the Rio Grande Chapter's website at [www.nmspj.org](http://www.nmspj.org). Learn more about membership—and forming student chapters—at [www.spj.org](http://www.spj.org).

The vast majority of this resource guide was compiled by Alexa Schirtzinger. Laura Paskus and Peter St. Cyr contributed additional resources—and the reading recommendations were gleaned from journalists across the western United States.

## THE LAW

In New Mexico, two key laws—IPRA (the Inspection of Public Records Act) and OMA (the Open Meetings Act)—govern public meetings and public records. On the national level, FOIA (the Freedom of Information Act) applies to all federal agencies.

### **IPRA (New Mexico Inspection of Public Records Act)**

- The NM Attorney General’s [IPRA Compliance Guide](#) is a comprehensive, essential tool to understanding and using IPRA
- The basics:
  - You can file an IPRA request with any state, county or local agency
  - Under no circumstances must you say *why* you want to inspect certain records
  - **Within 3 business days**, the records custodian must respond to your request, acknowledging that he/she received the request and letting you know when he/she will respond to it
  - If possible, custodians must fulfill records request **within 15 calendar days**. If they require more time, they must explain why, and when they plan to fulfill your request.
  - If your request is denied in part or in full, the custodian must explain why.
- Some tips:
  - Be specific. For instance, if you’re looking for a specific email sent, let’s say, during the legislative session, don’t ask for “all emails sent or received by Jane Doe.” Instead, ask for “all emails sent or received by Jane Doe between Jan. 1, 2013 and March 15, 2013.” If your request is too broad, a custodian may deny it.
  - To avoid needless delays, identify the records custodian before you send your request. (This can usually be accomplished with a quick call to the public agency.)
  - Don’t be afraid to have a conversation! Many public officials are happy to help you find what you’re looking for, so don’t be afraid to call and ask. Unless you’re working with highly sensitive material, a quick conversation with an agency spokesperson (to the effect of, “how do you file budget documents? what format do you store them in? if I want to compare the past three years, is there any specific document I should ask for?”) can eliminate a lot of needless time-wasting.
- Complaints
  - If you feel that a public agency has violated IPRA or OMA, you can [file a formal complaint](#) with the Attorney General’s office. However, keep in mind that complaints can take months to investigate, so if your story is time-sensitive, it’s not likely to help you.

### OMA (NM Open Meetings Act)

- The NMAGO also offers an [OMA Compliance Guide](#)
- The basics:
  - OMA essentially requires all public bodies to hold meetings that are open to the public and journalists
  - A new law requires that public bodies give **72-hour notice** before holding a public meeting

### FOIA (federal Freedom of Information Act)

- Somewhat surprisingly, one of the best resources for FOIA tips and tactics is the govt-run [foia.gov](http://foia.gov). For more resources, see the last section (“resources”).

### Libel (and other scary stuff...)

- **Libel:** I’m no lawyer, but here’s one thing you need to know: **Truth** is the best defense. In general (mostly!), you cannot be faulted for printing something that’s true (which is why fact-checking is *SO* important). Furthermore, to be convicted of libel, you must have *malicious intent*—ie, you knew it wasn’t true, and you printed it *in order to hurt someone*.
- **Wiretapping:** Each state differs, but New Mexico is a *one-party state*, meaning that it is **legal** to record a conversation as long as **one party** knows it’s being recorded. As a journalist, this means you can (technically) record a conversation without telling the other person you’re recording. However, it’s always better to ask your source whether they’re comfortable with being recorded; in general, we only record conversations without permission if we’re dealing with a particularly intractable source.
- **Shield laws:** New Mexico **does not** have a shield law, but we do have rules of evidence that protect certain elements of a journalist’s work from being subpoenaed. To wit:  
*New Mexico Rules of Evidence*  
11-514 News media-confidential source or information privilege
  - “B. General rule of privilege. A person engaged or employed by news media for the purpose of gathering, procuring, transmitting, compiling, editing or disseminating news for the general public or on whose behalf news is so gathered, procured, transmitted, compiled, edited or disseminated has a privilege to refuse to disclose:
  - “(1) the confidential source from or through whom any information was procured, obtained, supplied, furnished, gathered, transmitted, compiled, edited, disseminated, or delivered in the course of pursuing professional activities; and
  - “(2) any confidential information obtained in the course of pursuing professional activities.

## **REPORTING TOOLS**

### **Crime, Courts, Criminal Justice**

- The New Mexico Corrections Department keeps a [searchable database](#) of all current and former offenders, with rap sheets and downloadable photos. Most regional facilities (county jails) offer a similar service on their websites.
- The [NM Sex Offender Registry](#) has a searchable list of sex offenders with photos
- The FBI's [Uniform Crime Reports](#) are the most comprehensive source for crime data by city, county, state, year, type of offense, etc.
- nmcourts.gov offers a [searchable tool](#) allowing you to find criminal and civil cases by first name, last name, judicial district and much more
- Opinions filed in the [New Mexico Supreme Court](#) and state [Court of Appeals](#) are available on their respective websites
- for federal cases, you generally need a [PACER](#) account (check if your school has one, or borrow someone's—but be careful; downloads can be costly)

### **Covering Politics**

- local
  - The Secretary of State's website has a searchable [campaign finance information system](#), as well as a list of all registered state [lobbyists](#) and other election information
  - The [New Mexico Legislature](#) publishes all [bills](#), voting and attendance records, [redistricting information](#) and [lawmaker information](#) on its website
- federal
  - [OpenSecrets.org](#) is the most comprehensive tool, with searchable engines for campaign donations, campaign spending, lobbying and PAC spending
  - The Federal Election Commission also maintains a [searchable database](#) of campaign finance information

### **Covering State and Federal Government**

- The state's [Sunshine Portal](#) contains searchable and downloadable information about state budgets, contracts, employee salaries and other information
- [This website](#) also contains a list of all non-exempt state employees and their salaries
- County and municipal resources vary by location
- [US Census Bureau](#) data is also useful and pretty much endless
- Federal funding/contract spending [www.usaspending.gov](#). Searchable form [here](#).

## Covering Business

- In New Mexico, all corporations must register with the Secretary of State's office; [click here](#) to search the site. Most individual counties also have their own corporation registries.
- Publicly traded corporations must also file annual reports (called 10Ks) with the US [Securities & Exchange Commission](#). Learn to read these; they contain a wealth of interesting info.
- [GuideStar](#) offers information on nonprofits and charities
- The [New Mexico Regulation & Licensing Division](#) maintains records of all licenses and licensees, from contractors to nursing homes

## Social Media

- Twitter! If you're not on it, you should be! It's a great way to keep up on topic-specific news. Follow hashtags like [#nmfire](#) for fire news and [#nmleg](#) for legislative stuff. Or use Twitter's [search function](#) to find any mentions of your town, a public official, whatever.
- [Facebook](#) is a good resource for backgrounding public officials, cops, or anyone else you're researching. It can also be an easy way to crowdsource feedback or publish a poll
- Instagram can be good for locally sourced images (but you have to get permission); Vine for video

## Interactive Tools

- The [Google Drive](#) suite has just about everything: spreadsheets that convert into easy interactive charts; maps you can tailor to any story; etc.
- [Flickr](#) and [Picasa](#) have slideshow tools
- [Wikimedia Commons](#): good source for public-domain photos (but check the copyright info before you use!)
- [Dipity](#) is a good tool for building interactive timelines
- [Storify](#) sources from social media posts for a fun add-on to online stories
- [DocumentCloud](#) is my favorite tool for uploading and posting documents along with online versions of stories
- [iMovie](#) is an easy Mac tool for short videos; if you're fancy, you can use [FinalCut Pro](#)

## With your iPhone, you can make some quick but awesome videos:

- With Vine, you can make a six-second video teaser for your story
- Use Videoliscious to make a slideshow with a voiceover and music. (You can use and view on your phone and also use YouTube to embed the slideshow onto your website.)

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- The [Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press](#) is an awesome resource for journalists around the country; they have a team of lawyers who provide legal advice to journalists, free of charge. They also offer an app for on-the-go advice.
- The [Sunlight Foundation](#) not only has great tips and recommendations, but also stores a bunch of data on its website
- The [Electronic Frontier Foundation](#) is a great resource for online and digital issues  
The [First Amendment Center](#) - also good
- The New Mexico Bar Association published a [Legal Guide for Journalists](#) (it's from 2008, though; be warned)
- The [New Mexico Foundation for Open Government](#) does not offer legal advice, but can give quotes for stories or help with non-legal advice
- The SPJ Rio Grande Chapter's Freedom of Information Committee is working on putting together a response team to help with journalists' FOI issues. [www.nmspj.org](http://www.nmspj.org)
- Keep up-to-date on all sorts of issues, from training to ethics, by subscribing to the Poynter newsletter. [www.Poynter.org](http://www.Poynter.org)
- Poynter's NewsU offers affordable, online training: <http://www.newsu.org/>
- The Society of Professional Journalists has a Journalist's Toolbox: <http://www.journaliststoolbox.org/>

## **Recommended Reading:**

We sent out a call for journalists' favorite books about their craft and trade (see above about using Facebook and Twitter for crowdsourcing) and compiled this list of awesome books:

### **Guides and Technical Books:**

Doing Documentary Work, by Robert Coles

Sound Reporting: The NPR Guide to Audio Journalism and Production, by Jonathan Kern

The Investigative Reporter's Handbook: A Guide to Documents, Databases, and Techniques, by Brant Houston and Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc.

The Associated Press Stylebook (buy the most recent edition, or subscribe online)

Thinking Like Your Editor: How to Write Great Serious Nonfiction—and Get it Published, by Susan Rabiner and Alfred Fortunato

The Art and Craft of Feature Writing, by William E. Blundell

On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction, by William Zinsser

The Science Writers' Handbook: Everything You Need to Know to Pitch, Publish, and Prosper in the Digital Age, Edited by Thomas Hayden and Michelle Nijhuis

Working with Words: A Concise Handbook for Media Writers and Editors, by Brian S. Brooks and James L. Pinson

The Elements of Style, William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White

### **Memoirs, Essays, Graphic Novels, Fiction, True Crime, and Auto/biographies (and just some great non-fiction books written by awesome journalists):**

The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation, by Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff

News for All The People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media, by Juan González and Joseph Torres

All the President's Men, by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward

Here at the New Yorker, by Brendan Gill

The Paris Edition: The Autobiography of Waverly Root

The Press, by A.J. Liebling (read whatever you can by Liebling!)

American Carnival: Journalism Under Siege in an Age of New Media, by Neil Henry

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, by Hunter S. Thompson

The Boys on the Bus, by Tim Crouse

To Hell in a Handbasket, by H. Allen Smith

Deadline, by James Reston

Personal History, by Katherine Graham

Journalism, by Joe Sacco

The New, New Journalism: Conversations With America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft, by Robert S. Boynton

**(continued) Memoirs, Essays, Graphic Novels, Fiction, True Crime, and Auto/biographies  
(and just some great non-fiction books written by awesome journalists):**

The Face of War, by Martha Gellhorn

The Soccer War, by Ryszard Kapuscinski

Imperium, by Ryszard Kapuscinski

The Shadow of the Sun, by Ryszard Kapuscinski

Transmetropolitan, by Warren Ellis and Darick Robertson

Scandalmaker, by William Safire

Hitch-22, by Christopher Hitchens

Dispatches, by Michael Herr

The Journalist and the Murderer, by Janet Malcom

Remembering Mr. Shawn's New Yorker: The Invisible Art of Editing, by Ved Mehta

Travels with Myself and Another: A Memoir, by Martha Gellhorn

The New Kings of Nonfiction, edited by Ira Glass

Anything written by John McPhee

The Death and Life of Dith Pran, by Sydney H. Schanberg

In Cold Blood, by Truman Capote

The Executioner's Song, by Norman Mailer

Shot Through the Heart, by Mikal Gilmore

The Fly on the Wall, by Tony Hillerman

Down by the River, by Charles Bowden

The Right Stuff, by Tom Wolfe

# SPJ 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. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. Members of the Society share a dedication to ethical behavior and adopt this code to declare the Society's principles and standards of practice.

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The SPJ Code of Ethics is voluntarily embraced by thousands of journalists, regardless of place or platform, and is widely used in newsrooms and classrooms as a guide for ethical behavior. The code is intended not as a set of "rules" but as a resource for ethical decision-making. It is not — nor can it be under the First Amendment — legally enforceable.

## Seek Truth and Report It

**Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.**

### Journalists should:

- Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.
- Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing.
- Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability.
- Always question sources' motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises.
- Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.
- Never distort the content of news photos or video. Image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible. Label montages and photo illustrations.
- Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.
- Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story
- Never plagiarize.

- Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so.
  - Examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others.
  - Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.
  - Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
  - Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.
  - Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.
  - Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.
  - Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection.
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## **Minimize Harm**

**Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.**

### **Journalists should:**

- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
  - Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.
  - Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.
  - Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.
  - Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.
  - Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes.
  - Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.
  - Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed.
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## **Act Independently**

**Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.**

### **Journalists should:**

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.
  - Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
  - Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity.
  - Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
  - Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.
  - Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.
  - Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.
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## **Be Accountable**

**Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other.**

### **Journalists should:**

- Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
  - Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.
  - Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
  - Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.
  - Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.
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*The SPJ Code of Ethics is voluntarily embraced by thousands of writers, editors and other news professionals. The present version of the code was adopted by the 1996 SPJ National Convention, after months of study and debate among the Society's members.*

*Sigma Delta Chi's first Code of Ethics was borrowed from the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1926. In 1973, Sigma Delta Chi wrote its own code, which was revised in 1984, 1987 and 1996.*