Version 1.0, adopted 05 June 2026, next review June 2027

0. Authority and status

0.1 This Code is adopted by CPA as a binding ethical standard for members and is intended to operate alongside CPA's Rules and any applicable By-laws. A failure to comply with this Code may be treated as a breach of CPA governance requirements, and may constitute conduct "unbecoming" or "prejudicial to the interests" of the Association, which can enliven CPA's disciplinary processes.

0.2 This Code sets standards for publishers, proprietors, owners, directors, and senior commercial decision makers. It complements, and does not replace, the professional ethics obligations of journalists and editors.

1. Purpose

This Code sets the ethical and governance standards expected of CPA members and the people who own, control, manage, publish, and commercially direct member publications. Its aims are:

(a) to protect public trust in regional and local journalism,

(b) to safeguard editorial independence,

(c) to ensure transparent management of conflicts of interest,

(d) to support fair, accurate, and accountable publishing practices.

2. Relationship to other standards

2.1 Minimum editorial standards, Australian Press Council

CPA members commit to comply with the Australian Press Council's Standards of Practice as amended from time to time, including its Statements of Principles, Specific Standards, and Advisory Guidelines.

2.2 Journalists
This Code is for publishers and proprietors. It does not replace workplace policies or professional codes that apply to journalists, editors, and staff, including the MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics where relevant.

2.3 Law
Members and covered persons must comply with applicable laws, including privacy, defamation, contempt, discrimination, electoral, and consumer laws.

3. Who this Code applies to

3.1 Members
This Code applies to CPA members, affiliated State Associations where adopted, and the publishing entities they represent.

3.2 Covered persons
It applies to any person who is, or acts as, any of the following for a member publication or member organisation:

(a) proprietor, owner, controller, beneficial owner,

(b) publisher, managing director, chief executive, general manager,

(c) director, partner, trustee, committee member, senior executive,

(d) head of commercial operations, advertising, sponsorships, or political advertising sales,

(e) any person who routinely influences commissioning, placement, promotion, suppression, or correction of editorial content, or allocation of editorial resources.

4. Core commitments
Covered persons will act with honesty, fairness, independence, transparency, and respect for the community, and will protect the integrity of editorial decision making.

5. Editorial independence and integrity

5.1 No improper influence
A covered person must not use, or attempt to use, their position, access, or financial leverage to improperly influence editorial decisions, including what is covered, how it is

framed, when it is published, who is quoted, whether it is promoted, or whether it is corrected.

5.2 Separation of duties

Members must maintain a clear separation between editorial decision makers and commercial decision makers. Editorial leaders must have authority to publish without interference from commercial, political, or personal interests.

5.3 Advertising and sponsored content

(a) Advertising must be clearly distinguishable from editorial content.

(b) Sponsored, supplied, advertorial and native content must be clearly labelled in print and online. Where such content appears within a clearly identified special feature, commercial feature, advertising feature, supplement or themed section, this requirement may be satisfied by clear and prominent labelling of the feature, section or supplement as a whole, provided a reasonable reader would understand the commercial, sponsored or supplied nature of the content.

(c) A covered person must not offer, solicit, or accept payment, services, or benefits in exchange for favourable editorial treatment.

5.4 Political advertising and elections

Members must treat political advertising in a lawful, transparent, and equitable manner, and must ensure election coverage and editorial commentary remain independent from ad sales arrangements.

6. Accuracy, corrections, and complaints

6.1 Corrections

Members must promptly correct significant errors, and ensure corrections are given appropriate prominence.

6.2 Complaints

Members must have a clear, accessible complaints pathway, including a publicly available contact point. Complaints must be handled fairly, promptly, and respectfully.

7. Conflicts of interest, declaration, and management

7.1 Core principle

A covered person should avoid real or apparent conflicts of interest. Where an actual, potential, or perceived conflict is material, it must be declared and managed so that editorial decisions remain independent and public trust is protected.

7.2 Declare and keep a simple record

A material conflict is any interest that a reasonable reader would want to know about when assessing the fairness and independence of coverage. A covered person must declare a material conflict as soon as practicable to the Editor in Chief (or the nominated Ethics Contact). An email is sufficient. The publication should keep a simple record of declarations (for example, a saved email folder or a one page list) and update it only when something changes.

Conflicts include, for example:

(a) holding, seeking, or campaigning for political office, or formal party roles,

(b) property development, land ownership, planning approvals, tenders, or procurement matters that could be affected by public decisions,

(c) substantial contracts or commercial relationships with government, councils, major advertisers, or other subjects of coverage,

(d) close personal or family relationships with subjects of coverage, or with decision makers relevant to coverage,

(e) any other financial, legal, or reputational interest that could reasonably be seen to influence coverage.

7.3 Manage the conflict, step aside

Where a declared conflict is material to a specific story, campaign, or editorial decision, the covered person must step back from that matter. At a minimum, they must not:

(a) direct, edit, or approve the relevant coverage (including headlines and placement),

(b) participate in the editorial decision making on that matter, or

(c) access non public editorial information about the matter beyond what is necessary to identify and manage the conflict.

The decision making for that matter must sit with an editor or senior staff member who is free of the conflict. The publication should make a brief record of the steps taken.

7.4 Public disclosure, only when it matters

Public disclosure is required only when the conflict is relevant to a reasonable reader's assessment of the specific coverage. This can be done by:

(a) a short disclosure note within the relevant article, editorial, or opinion piece,

(b) a standing "Ownership and Interests" note (online or in the masthead) for ongoing structural conflicts such as elected office or candidacy, or significant development interests that regularly intersect with local reporting, and

(c) where the covered person is a councillor, candidate, or political office holder, ensuring election or council coverage is overseen and signed off by an editor who is free of the conflict.

8. High risk conflicts, special rules

8.1 When an owner or publisher becomes a councillor, politician, candidate, or holds a political role

If a covered person is, or becomes, an elected official, a declared candidate, a staffer, an adviser, or holds a formal role in a political party or campaign, the member must:

(a) notify CPA and the relevant State Association within 7 days,

(b) publish a prominent public disclosure, online and in print, within 14 days, and again during any election period,

(c) implement a Political Role Editorial Independence Protocol, including:

(i) the conflicted person must not participate in editorial decisions about their electorate, council, portfolio, political opponents, party, or any matter that could reasonably affect their political interests,

(ii) election coverage decisions, including endorsements, editorials, and candidate profiles, must be made by an identified editorial leader who is not conflicted, with a documented rationale,

(iii) letters to the editor and opinion relating to the conflicted person's political sphere must be moderated, selected, and published by non conflicted editorial staff, applying consistent criteria,

(iv) where the conflicted person writes opinion, it must be clearly labelled as opinion, and include a standing disclosure of their political role,

(v) staff must be free to investigate and report on the conflicted person's political activities without interference.

(d) ensure any political advertising purchased by, or connected to, the conflicted person is managed by non conflicted staff and is clearly labelled.

8.2 When an owner or publisher is a developer, or has property development interests

If a covered person is a property developer, lobbyist, planning consultant, or has material property interests that could be affected by public decisions, the member must:

(a) publish an “Ownership and Interests” disclosure that identifies the relevant business interests at a level meaningful to readers,

(b) recuse the conflicted person from all editorial decisions regarding development, planning, zoning, infrastructure, council approvals, procurement, and related community debates in the relevant area,

(c) ensure development related advertising sales are handled without linkage to editorial treatment, and maintain a log of any allegations of linkage,

(d) include story level disclosures on relevant coverage, and

(e) if the publication advocates editorially on a development issue, the editorial must disclose the interest and be approved by a non conflicted editorial leader, with independent oversight.

8.3 Other significant commercial conflicts

Where a covered person has a substantial contract, procurement bid, or commercial relationship with an entity that is the subject of coverage, similar disclosures and recusals apply.

9. Gifts, benefits, hospitality, and inducements

9.1 Prohibited conduct

Covered persons must not accept gifts, hospitality, travel, discounts, or benefits that could reasonably be seen to influence their decisions, or the public’s perception of independence.

9.2 Register

Members must maintain a Gifts and Benefits Register for covered persons and senior editorial staff, and publish a summary policy on their website.

10. Confidentiality, privacy, and data stewardship

Covered persons must protect confidential information, sources, and personal information. They must ensure appropriate governance of reader data, subscriptions, and advertising data, including cyber security controls.

11. Respectful conduct and workplace safety

Members and covered persons must foster a safe, respectful, and lawful workplace, free from discrimination, harassment, bullying, and victimisation, and must support the wellbeing of staff and communities.

12. Implementation, training, and annual attestation

12.1 Training

Members must provide annual training for covered persons and relevant staff on this Code, conflicts, disclosures, and the editorial commercial separation.

12.2 Attestation

Each covered person must annually sign an attestation that they understand and will comply with this Code, and that their disclosures are complete and current.

13. Reporting and whistleblowing

Members must provide a safe mechanism for staff or community members to report suspected breaches of this Code, including the option to report to the State Association or CPA, without retaliation.

14. Breaches, sanctions, and procedural fairness

14.1 Investigation and response

Where CPA or a State Association receives a credible allegation of breach, it may request documents, disclosures, and management plans, and may appoint an ethics panel or investigator.

14.2 Sanctions

Sanctions may include education, formal warning, direction to publish a disclosure or correction, reprimand, suspension of membership rights, or expulsion.

14.3 Procedural fairness

Any disciplinary action should provide written notice of the alleged breach, a reasonable opportunity for the member to respond, and a fair appeal mechanism consistent with CPA's existing disciplinary and grievance procedures.

15. Competition and collaboration safeguards

This Code is intended to strengthen ethics and public trust. It must not be used to coordinate prices, allocate markets, restrict output, or otherwise facilitate anti competitive conduct. Members should ensure implementation is consistent with competition and consumer law guidance for voluntary industry codes.

APPENDIX A, public disclosure statement, examples

A1 Website disclosure, example

"Ownership and Interests, [Publication]. [Name], the proprietor and publisher, is a councillor for [Council] elected on [date]. [Name] is recused from editorial decisions relating to [Council] or matters affecting their political interests. Editorial responsibility for those matters rests with [Editor name and title]. Complaints can be directed to [email]."

A2 Story disclosure, example

"The publisher is a councillor for [Council] and is recused from this coverage."

APPENDIX B, minimum Political Role Editorial Independence Protocol, checklist

- Named editorial lead with final authority
- Written recusal and information barrier
- Election coverage plan signed off by editorial lead
- Standing disclosures in relevant opinion pieces
- Complaints pathway and logs

APPENDIX C, Conflict of Interest disclosure, minimum fields

- Person, role
- Interest type, political, development, commercial, other

- Description, scope, geography
- Date commenced, date disclosed
- Controls, recusal, oversight, disclosure placements
- Review date, sign off