

Annenberg Media Editorial Review Policy explainer

In September, Annenberg Media received a request to unpublish a story about a student who accused former USC gynecologist George Tyndall of sexual assault. In an effort to minimize harm to the alumna profiled in the piece, we removed the story from our website. This request sparked a larger conversation within our newsroom about whether Annenberg Media should codify how it handles requests to review published pieces.

According to our [ethics policy](#), stories could only be altered post-publication or airing due to factual errors or serious inaccuracies. We also had a no deletion policy. We're now expanding our approach in a way that will allow Annenberg Media's student editors and producers to revisit stories on a case-by-case basis at the request of a source. In the case of the story about the sexual assault survivor, it will be republished with a note and the name of the student will be removed from the piece.

As a student media outlet, we routinely evaluate the impact of our coverage on the USC student body and surrounding community. Following the discovery of dozens of alleged incidents of sexual assault and harassment by Tyndall, our coverage has never more directly related to traumatic experiences endured by the people in our community.

One of our core journalistic principles is to minimize harm. We believe our coverage should provide accountability, but not at the expense of a victim. Since Annenberg Media publishes digital stories on the internet, searchable by anyone at any point in time, the need for a centralized process for reviewing stories has become apparent.

Annenberg Media believes the integrity of the newsroom and a source's right to have a voice in their own story are not mutually exclusive. By introducing a clear process for potential changes to archival material, our newsroom can facilitate its breaking news coverage while enabling survivors to hold a level of autonomy over their stories after they have been published.

In an effort to be as transparent as possible about this process, any material that is altered will have an editor's note indicating the changes made and why.

To find our application form for reviewing articles, visit [here](#). We've included a list of questions below that pertain to how the process will work in our newsroom.

FAQs

What stories are considered?

We are prioritizing stories that involve sensitive material such as sexual assault, discrimination, substance abuse, etc., and have harmed a community or person's well-being. We will be looking most closely at language, images and angles that are potentially hurtful. Personal preferences — such as rooting for a sports team or political choices — are given less weight, especially if they have not directly caused personal harm.

Are you concerned about erasing history?

We're looking at each application and assessing what steps are appropriate to take in protecting a source's privacy. One of our goals as a newsroom is to minimize harm. Considering the history of USC and our coverage, we understand that some changes may be needed in protecting the dynamic lives of those we report on.

What actions does this initiative involve? Will you delete stories? Will you remove names?

What about Google?

We have a number of options, including updating a story with new information and providing full anonymity. We will consider every case on its own merits, and take the action appropriate based on the individual circumstances. Options include using first names and no last name, using initials, providing full anonymity, editing a story that may contain sensitive information, editing or removing a graphic or image attached to a story and, in extreme cases, unpublishing.

What if I am featured in a story that is embarrassing?

We will consider all requests.

Who can apply?

Anyone named in an Annenberg Media story can apply. You cannot apply on behalf of someone else, and we must be able to verify that the person applying is the person who has been included in the story.

What if I am featured in a photograph, but not in the text of a story?

We will consider all requests.

How long will the process take?

We handle requests as quickly and efficiently as we can. The Equity Board will meet weekly in the first few months after the program launches to go over all requests and establish a new timeline once the policy has been accommodated into the workflow of Annenberg Media. We will ensure to respond in a timely manner. If your request is approved, you must respond back to the email and schedule a meeting date within one week to see through that changes will be made.

What steps will you take when considering a case?

We will read through all requests. If your request is approved for review, the committee will meet to further discuss the situation and set up a Zoom call or in-person meeting with you. We will then meet with the journalist(s), explaining the situation and getting their input on the matter. We will come to a final decision after and make you aware of what changes will be made.

What factors will you consider when weighing a request?

We consider a number of factors in determining how to handle a request, including: the gravity of the topic of the article, the impact the article has had on the source and community, how long ago the story was published and the value of keeping the information public. Matters of personal opinion, such as favoring a political candidate, will be given less weight.

Who's on the committee?

The review committee is made up of the Equity Board members and the Annenberg Media top student leaders.

What is required for the application?

Fill out this [form](#). Please do not email your application to our email address or to individual reporters at Annenberg Media.