

On Sept 22 2017 the Board requested position paper(s) addressing four issues. This is a draft response to the second issue:

2. How to address perceived bias based on where funding is coming from

Response: We have no evidence of public perception that the NNC favours the news media in its decisions, or that it dismisses or discounts complaints because the NNC is supported by news media member fees.

We value our role as an impartial mediator and voluntary self-regulatory body. It is important to note that the membership-based funding model is used by the majority of press councils in the Association of Independent Press Councils of Europe as well as the Australian Press Council. A small number of those press councils also have some level of government or, more rarely, foundation funding, but membership fees provide the bulk of operating revenue.

The Canadian media, outside of Quebec, has consistently rejected government funding for press councils. Extrapolating from data in the Shattered Mirror report by the Public Policy Forum, it can be assumed that the public would place less credibility in a government-funded press council.

The NNC understands that some members of the public may infer bias because of funding. It has and will continue to counter such perception through the quality and transparency of NNC decisions.

The NNC has already demonstrated to complainants that their concerns are taken seriously, treated respectfully, and investigated carefully. It has experience with complainants who, while not satisfied with the result of an investigation, are satisfied that the process was fair and that they were heard.

NNC decisions will continue to depend on the collective and informed input of directors and staff, and will be written to reflect the thorough consideration given to both the complainant's and the news media's point of view.

This careful consideration and lack of favouritism will be evident in news releases that inform the public and the media about NNC decisions.

Additional assurance that counters potential negative impression of favouritism due to member-based funding flows from the daily work of NNC staff, who provide one-on-one education via phone and email. The individually-delivered education, often but not always shaped by a specific problem, helps the public to understand how the media works and breaks down adversarial borders.

Again referring to the Shattered Mirror report, focus groups conducted by the Public Policy Forum strongly indicate that the Canadian public does not know how the media works or how news comes to be. The NNC can help bridge that knowledge gap by working with and informing like-minded groups, and through outreach to civic-minded groups such as Rotary Clubs. This will be a more generalized version of the one-on-one education staff does with complainants, and will deliver the message that the NNC is about journalism standards and ethics. Outreach of this nature can be undertaken by staff and/or by directors, either in a concerted campaign around an event such as World Media Freedom Day, or in an ongoing manner as opportunity arises.

The NNC's growing social media presence is another means of underlining its neutrality. NNC social media posts, which focus on ethical issues and developments affecting journalism practice, showcase Council's overriding interest in the quality and health of journalism, even when that means highlighting articles that are critical of the media.

