

Professional Standards Advisory PS-1 (May 2004)

DISCLOSURE OF EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF CLIENT-BASED PR AGENCY STAFF

All PRSA members pledge adherence to the Society's Member Code of Ethics. As issues arise relating to the practice of public relations, the Board of Ethics and Professional Standards (BEPS) is charged with providing guidance on such issues within the framework of the Code provisions. The PRSA Board of Directors then announces these guidelines through this series of professional standards advisories. The PRSA Member Code of Ethics may be found online at www.prsa.org.

ISSUE: Disclosure of employment status of public relations agency staff or independent public relations consultants who work on-site at a client's offices.

BACKGROUND: Today there are a variety of practices in terms of the client-agency/consultant relationship. A practice that is apparently being used more frequently is one in which employees of an agency or independent consultants work on-site at the client organization, in either a full or part-time capacity. Sometimes they are identified with company titles. Having agency staff or consultants on-site can benefit the client company by providing face-to-face access to their counsel and support. Plus, the additional personnel are available to handle routine or specific PR responsibilities.

However, at a time when openness and transparency in communications is recognized as a "best practice" for companies and organizations, public relations professionals must consider the issue of disclosure.

RELEVANT SECTIONS OF THE PRSA CODE: There are three Code provisions and one professional value that relate to this issue.

Code Provisions

Free Flow of Information. Maintain the integrity of relationships with the media, government officials and the public to protect and advance the free flow of accurate and truthful information.

Disclosure of Information. Open communications foster informed decision-making and build trust. Be honest and accurate in all communications.

Conflicts of Interest. Avoid real, potential or perceived conflicts of interest.

Professional Values

Fairness. Deal fairly with clients, employers, competitors, peers, vendors, the media and the general public.

RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICE: When speaking to the public and/or the media on behalf of a client, agency personnel or independent consultants should uniformly and clearly identify themselves as outside spokespeople, retained by the company.