

PROMISE & PITFALLS:

The Ethical Use of AI For Public Relations Practitioners

Updated Guidance from the PRSA Board of Ethics and Professional Standards (BEPS)



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Summary of Substantive Changes (2023→2025)

This document represents a revision to the PRSA Board of Ethics and Professional Standards' (BEPS) original "Promise & Pitfalls," published in 2023. It expands on the earlier guidance, reflecting the proliferation of AI tools and their widespread use and shifting from a conceptual/ethical overview to a practical, structured handbook. Importantly, the document reframes PR pros as active governors of AI adoption rather than cautious users. While the updated guidance does not address all issues related to AI and the profession, it provides an ethical framework for PR practitioners for the foreseeable future.

- **Broader Scope:** Expanded from a primarily ethical overview to a practical, structured handbook with "how-to" guides, FAQs, and legal/regulatory analysis.
- **Transparency Elevated:** A new section on disclosure protocols for AI use in content, visuals, hiring, reporting, and contracts.
- **Action-Oriented:** Added best practices and immediate actions across literacy, privacy, responsible use, and bias.
- **Governance & Training:** New guidance on vendor assessment, team training, interdisciplinary advisory groups, and human-in-the-loop requirements.
- **Regulatory Detail:** Expanded focus on copyright, trademarks, FTC disclosure, state-level laws, and international regulations (e.g., EU AI Act, GDPR).
- **Framing Shift:** Moves from "AI as a risky tool" to "AI as embedded systems requiring oversight," positioning PR professionals as leaders and ethical gatekeepers.

The authors wish to acknowledge and thank the BEPS members who developed the original AI guidance upon which this document builds.

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This summary of changes was generated using GPT-5 from OpenAI and then edited and validated by the editors of Version 2.0.

Our Values

- **Advocacy:** PR professionals advocate for clients and the public interest. Using AI ethically ensures that advocacy is grounded in truth and transparency.
- **Expertise:** Using AI responsibly requires an understanding of its capabilities and limitations. PR professionals must apply their knowledge and judgment to ensure ethical use.
- **Fairness:** AI systems can perpetuate bias or discrimination if not carefully monitored. Fairness demands equitable treatment and respect for all audiences.
- **Honesty:** AI-generated content can easily spread misinformation if not properly vetted. Honesty requires that all communication be truthful and accurate.
- **Independence:** Professionals must provide objective counsel. Over-reliance on AI without human judgment can compromise independence.
- **Loyalty:** Safeguard trust by being transparent in AI use and protecting client and stakeholder interests, including trade secrets and intellectual property, while serving the public good.

Best Practices

- **Build Foundational Literacy:** Build AI literacy by understanding how it works, setting clear policies, verifying inputs/outputs, and fostering ongoing training, ethical use, and critical thinking.
- **Protect Data and Privacy:** Protect sensitive data by using secure AI systems, auditing vendors, staying current on laws and regulations, and managing permissions and risks responsibly.
- **Apply AI Responsibly:** Lead with human judgment, empathy, and transparency when using AI—leveraging its strengths while safeguarding ethics, legal compliance, and transparent disclosure.
- **Maintain Critical Evaluation and Bias Awareness:** Reduce AI bias and risk by involving diverse perspectives, testing outputs, aligning use with values, and keeping humans as final decision-makers.
- **Detect and Prevent Mis/Disinformation:** Uphold ethics by practicing digital hygiene and resilience, promoting media literacy, demanding the transparency of sources, and correcting falsehoods to protect and promote trust and credibility. Potentially exert pressure on platforms via PR, coalitions, policy, media, and stakeholder engagement.

AI is not a peer with moral responsibility. Accountability belongs to people. What matters most is leading it, explaining it, and using it in ways that are ethical, transparent, and build trust.

About this Document

This guidance provides ethical principles and practical recommendations for public relations (PR) practitioners, educators, and students on the responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI). Its goal is to ensure that AI is applied in ways that strengthen, not compromise, the PR profession and build a healthier media and information environment.

Remain grounded in the core values of the PRSA Code of Ethics. As AI increasingly shapes how people think, work, communicate, and make critical decisions, the PR field must remain grounded in its core values: advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty, and fairness.

Balance efficiency with ethical responsibility. PR professionals should use AI to improve the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of their work while upholding ethical advocacy. As communicators, public relations professionals are uniquely positioned to foster inclusive dialogue, safeguard informed decision-making, and educate both the public and their organizations on recognizing and resisting malicious uses of AI.

Access best practices for responsible AI use. The document provides practical tools for leadership, such as how to assess vendors, design AI training, apply the profession's code of ethics, and understand the risks, benefits, and evolving legal implications of AI. A set of frequently asked questions closes the guidance, offering additional clarity and direction for everyday use.

Reflect and lead with purpose. AI will undoubtedly change the world. PR professionals must think critically before moving forward, ensuring speed doesn't come at the expense of responsibility. Be the steady voice—championing transparency, trust, and ethical use of emerging tools.

Note: Portions of this document were developed using generative AI tools to support research, ideation, and editing. All content was reviewed and finalized by the editors to ensure ethical alignment and professional accuracy.

Background

PR pros have long relied on digital tools. Today, they are turning to generative AI tools to create content, analyze data, and streamline tasks. AI agents are now entering the mix—autonomous systems that respond to stakeholders, adapt strategies, and take action without human prompting.

These tools operate on large language models trained to detect patterns in vast datasets. They don't "know" facts—they generate responses by predicting the most likely next word or image based on the data they've seen. Because there is no experiential understanding or judgment, their outputs may reflect bias, factual errors, or outdated assumptions. That creates risk: misinformation can spread quickly, proprietary content may be exposed, and errors can go unnoticed without human review.

PR professionals bring the curiosity and judgment AI lacks. The question isn't whether PR pros should use AI but how to do so ethically, strategically, and responsibly. The challenge is balancing efficiency with accuracy, trust, and the human touch.

What is Artificial Intelligence?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to systems designed to simulate human intelligence and decision-making processes. There are different types of AI and terms to know. Here are two essential ones to understand:

- **Generative AI** tools can draft copy, translate text, design graphics, produce audio and video, generate strategic insights, and simulate human conversation. These tools generate new content based on patterns in large datasets.
- **Agentic AI** goes a step further. These are AI systems that can make decisions and take actions on the user's behalf to achieve a set goal or task. This includes automating tasks, managing workflows, deciding what steps are needed to conduct research, or launching campaigns. They can integrate with other systems and operate with a high level of autonomy.

These tools are actively shaping how communication work is practiced, making it even more important to understand their strengths, limits, and ethical implications.

Why AI Matters to PR Pros and Communicators

AI transforms the way we work, research, write, analyze, and communicate. Used wisely, it scales insight and creativity. Used recklessly, it risks damaging trust, accuracy, and privacy, spreading misinformation, perpetuating biases, and damaging the PR profession.

Our role is to be the responsible and ethical conscience in this transformation.

As AI becomes a frontline actor, communicators will define what credibility looks like in an AI-powered public sphere. What we normalize today—transparency, oversight, equity—will define how the public trusts PR and views the PR profession tomorrow.

AI Uses in PR Today

Strategy and Planning

- Strategic planning and decision making
- Modeling and scenario planning
- Reputation risk forecasting
- Stakeholder mapping and relationship management
- Governance of brand voice across distributed teams

Research and Intelligence

- Conducting market and audience research and message testing
- Auditing brand sentiment
- Monitoring workplace sentiment, engagement, and productivity, and identifying retention risks
- Analyzing data sets and creating reports

Creative Development and Personalization

- Brainstorming creative campaign ideas
- Personalizing communications by target audience
- Drafting press releases, blogs, social content, and emails
- Translating content across languages
- Creating and editing visuals, animations, and video
- Improving accessibility

Media Distribution and Engagement

- Generating media lists and creating personalized pitches for journalists based on their beat, past stories, or expressed interests.
- Using AI-powered chatbots to handle routine press requests or provide instant access to media kits
- Monitoring news coverage and social media posts to guide timely outreach and engagement

Performance, Operations, and Talent

- Tracking and reporting performance
- Automating workflow
- Knowledge management
- Recruiting employees, including screening résumés, analyzing video interviews, and utilizing chatbots for applications

AI and Our Professional Ethics

Why Care About Using AI Responsibly and Ethically?

A proactive and thoughtful examination of potential ethical issues associated with the use of AI tools helps ensure accuracy, privacy, fairness, and transparency, while mitigating potential biases and other risks.

When using AI tools, practitioners should consider the impact of AI outputs and actions on stakeholders, as well as how these outputs and actions contribute to and advance informed decision-making.

Use of AI Without Oversight Leads to:

- Unintentional spreading of misinformation or “hallucinated” (false) content
- Producing biased outputs that perpetuate discrimination
- Causing inadvertent plagiarism or copyright violations
- Exposing confidential or proprietary data
- Masking AI authorship (eroding trust)
- Bypassing human accountability

As AI becomes embedded in daily practice, PR professionals are positioned to lead its ethical and responsible use. This is a critical moment to explore how emerging tools can improve outcomes while upholding the values that define our work.

Like social media, AI introduces powerful capabilities without changing our ethical foundation. It requires us to pause, assess, and recommit to integrity, transparency, and public trust.

The [PRSA Code of Ethics](#) remains our guide. Its core values—advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty, and fairness—help us evaluate AI’s risks, protect data, avoid bias, and ensure meaningful stakeholder engagement.

Aligning AI use with the Code strengthens our impact. It equips us to make informed, values-driven decisions that serve the public good and reinforce our credibility in an evolving profession.

What PR and Communication Pros Need to Know

Build Foundational Literacy

- Understand how AI works, including large language models, prompts, limitations, and common risks such as hallucinations, bias, and data security vulnerabilities.
- Explore reputable sources for additional professional development of knowledge, skills, and abilities
- Verify the inputs and outputs of AI tools, and help audiences build resilience through skills like media literacy, critical thinking, and AI fluency.

Immediate Actions:

- Establish a company AI policy and share it.
- Regularly train staff and clients on AI basics and best practices, and cultivate an environment to discuss AI use openly.
- Fact-check and verify sources before use.

Protect Data and Privacy

- Never enter personally identifiable information (PII), client intellectual property (IP), proprietary information (PI), or confidential materials into public AI tools.
- Always review and manage permissions before enabling AI tools.
- Stay current on evolving regulations, including state-level laws such as the Texas Responsible AI Governance Act ([2026](#)).
- Use independent, third-party analyses of AI models and API providers (e.g., [artificialanalysis.ai](#)) to understand risk profiles.

Immediate Actions:

- Audit vendors for ethical AI use.
- Check local, state, and federal laws impacting AI, copyright, and fair use.
- Use closed AI systems for sensitive client work.

Apply AI Responsibly

- Provide clear counsel to clients and organizations on AI's benefits and risks. Advise to lead with a human voice and empathy, embrace innovation, and keep sound judgment central.
- Use AI for drafting, summarizing, trend spotting, and brainstorming—but let human judgment lead strategy, ethics, crisis response, and reputation management.
- Do not upload copyrighted materials (e.g., paywalled journal articles) without permission—this is both unethical and illegal.
- Incorporate transparency, disclosure, and diligence policies into contracts, client communications, and public-facing content.

Immediate Actions:

- Keep a human gatekeeper in the loop before anything goes live.
- Disclose AI use (what, why, how) when appropriate.
- Share lessons learned, both successes and mistakes, across teams and clients.
- Make sure disclosure policies are obvious, easy to understand, truthful, and aligned with organizational principles.
- Ensure that disclosure is consistent with applicable laws, regulations, or best practices in your jurisdiction.

Maintain Critical Evaluation and Bias Awareness

- Train teams to identify and address misleading, exclusionary, or insensitive AI-generated content.
- Bring diverse perspectives into prompt design, model training, fine-tuning, and content review processes to reduce systemic bias.
- Test AI outputs with diverse user groups through “red-teaming,” which is intentionally trying to find flaws or unsafe behavior before roll-out.
- Use a diagnostic prompt to “sanity check” GPT outputs and verify claims, minimizing hallucinations.

Immediate Actions:

- Form a cross-functional AI advisory group to bring together diverse perspectives, including technical, legal, ethical, DEI, communications, HR, and risk management experts, as well as external audiences like customers, to guide responsible adoption of AI.
- Establish internal guidelines that align AI use with brand values and governance.
- Document significant AI use, especially in public-facing, high-impact work.
- Always monitor for and seek to mitigate bias.
- Ensure the final decision-maker is always human.

AI is a tool. PR professionals are trusted strategic advisors to their organizations. Use judgment, apply the PRSA Code of Ethics, and lead with transparency.

Transparency

PRSA AI Ethics Guideline: Be transparent about the use of AI in most public relations practices. Clearly disclose when content, decisions, or interactions are significantly influenced or generated by AI, especially when this information could impact how messages are perceived, how relationships are built, and how trust is maintained.

The importance of transparency is grounded in PRSA's Code of Ethics – particularly the provisions of Free Flow of Information, Disclosure of Information, and Enhancing the Profession, as well as the Core Values of Honesty, Loyalty, and Fairness. Transparency about our use of AI upholds both public trust and professional integrity.

When it comes to the use of AI in communication and public relations, transparency is of utmost importance. The initial PRSA Promise and Pitfalls document provided guidance under Enhancing the Profession, which counsels professionals to maintain transparency about how AI is being used and seek input from internal and external audiences about AI practices and how its use is communicated.

While AI technologies and their tactical and strategic use are rapidly evolving, transparency remains essential. Professionals must take reasonable, good-faith steps to ensure stakeholders understand how AI tools are being used and to what extent in internal, external, and client-facing communications and operations.

General Expectations:

- **Disclose Material Use of AI:** Clearly indicate when AI tools have meaningfully shaped content, strategy recommendations, or audience interactions. This includes texts, social posts, imagery, data analysis, video, and synthesized voices.
- **Acknowledge AI Contributions:** Just as we credit human collaborators and sources, we should acknowledge AI's role when it makes substantive contributions to our work. This builds credibility and fosters informed consent. This guidance includes employees disclosing AI use to their managers as well as external disclosures.
- **Communicate AI Practices Internally and Externally:** Inform employees, partners, and clients about the AI tools being used in campaigns and planning. Set expectations and document the level of AI involvement.

Situational Guidance

- **Disclose AI-Generated Visuals and Media:** Generally disclose when visuals (e.g., images, videos, voiceovers) are generated or enhanced using AI. This is especially critical today in public-facing materials, given the heightened ongoing public concern and the risk of misinformation.
 - A blanket disclosure on the website (e.g., "this company uses AI in its creative") is not sufficient for individual pieces of content.
 - When collaborating with clients or vendors, include AI usage terms in contracts or project briefs to clarify disclosure requirements.
- **Hiring and Personnel Evaluations:** Clearly communicate when AI is used in screening candidates, analyzing applications, or influencing hiring decisions. Transparency fosters fairness and trust with applicants and employees.
- **Measurement and Reporting:** If AI is used to summarize impact, coverage, tonality or other metrics, communicate its use clearly.
- **AI Substitutes:** When using AI to simulate or stand in for a person's voice, image, or likeness—such as for placeholders, internal mockups, or early-stage drafts—obtain clear, documented permission from the individual

and notify all relevant legal or compliance stakeholders. The AI-generated version should be used only for non-public, non-final purposes, with a commitment to replace it with authentic content before release.

Institutionalizing AI Transparency

- **Develop Disclosure Protocols:** Establish internal protocols or templates for consistent disclosure of AI usage that are consistent with your state, federal, industry, and other applicable legal requirements and the PRSA Code of Ethics.
- **Update Contracts:** Where applicable, include AI disclosure and usage clauses in contracts between agencies, vendors, clients, and subcontractors. This is essential in work-for-hire situations, where there are increased legal risks.
- **Regularly Engage Stakeholders:** Actively seek input from key audiences—internal and external—on how they would like your AI usage communicated to ensure clarity and comfort.

Disclosure Examples

- *“This content was generated with the use of AI.”*
- *“Portions of this document were developed using generative AI tools to support research, ideation, and editing. All content was reviewed and finalized by the editors to ensure ethical alignment and professional accuracy.”*
- *“AI generated 80% of this content; it was 100% reviewed by a human.”*

These examples are not mandatory, they are suggestions. Transparency goes beyond disclosing facts. Transparency preserves trust, demonstrates accountability, and enhances the profession. While norms around AI use will evolve, these practices ensure we maintain the highest ethical standards.

HOW TO LEAD AI ADOPTION WITH INTEGRITY

How To: Assess Vendors

- Here are a few sample questions to ask before selecting a tool or partner:
- How does your AI model handle data privacy and storage?
- Is any client data used to train the model, or is any of their data shared with third parties?
- Can the system identify the sources or origins of training data?
- What bias testing or audits have been conducted?
- Is there a human review process in place?
- Can we adjust or override AI outputs to align with our organizational values and goals?
- How do you ensure your systems stay compliant with current data and AI regulations at state, federal, and international levels? Consider the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the California Consumer Privacy Act of 2018 (CCPA).
- How frequently is the model updated, and who verifies accuracy?
- Do you provide documentation on limitations and ethical risks?

Guidance: If a vendor can't answer clearly, reconsider. If their platform replaces, rather than augments, professional judgment - walk away.

How To: Design AI Training for Your Team

Start with Core Competencies

- Define what AI fluency looks like for various roles (e.g., strategist, copywriter, media relations specialist).
- Build modules around ethical use, privacy, verification, and use-case evaluation.

Emphasize Practice Over Theory

- Use real-world PR scenarios to practice evaluating and editing AI-generated outputs.
- Encourage side-by-side comparisons of human vs. AI work to highlight nuance and judgment.

Incorporate Cross-Functional Learning

- Offer interdisciplinary workshops with IT/legal/data privacy experts to broaden understanding.
- Partner with educators, researchers, and vendors for timely insights and case studies.

Reinforce a Human-Centered Mindset

- Teach that AI is a tool—not a replacement—for creativity, critical thinking, and leadership.
- Promote co-creation: AI can accelerate ideas, but we ensure they're ethical, strategic, and on-brand.

How To: Apply the Code of Ethics

Overview

Applying the PRSA Code of Ethics to generative AI use requires more than simply knowing the values and provisions—it means evaluating how these tools shape professional decisions through the lens of advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty, and fairness. This section translates the Code into practical guidance, offering examples of misuse, recommended practices, and clear standards for integrating ethics into daily public relations work.

Values

Core Professional Values Applied to Generative AI

- **Advocacy:** Use AI in ways that strengthen advocacy by ensuring communication is grounded in truth, transparency, and the public interest.
- **Honesty:** Fact-check AI-generated content to prevent the spread of misinformation or fabricated information and ensure all communication remains truthful and accurate.
- **Expertise:** Apply professional knowledge and judgment to guide responsible AI use. Use AI to enhance, not replace, expertise, and remain accountable for AI-assisted decisions.
- **Independence:** Maintain objectivity by exercising human oversight in all AI-assisted work. Do not allow over-reliance on AI to compromise professional judgment.
- **Loyalty:** Balance loyalty to clients with responsibility to the public interest. Do not use AI in ways that betray trust, misrepresent intentions, or conceal conflicts.
- **Fairness:** Monitor AI systems for bias and discrimination. Ensure equitable treatment and respect for all audiences in AI-assisted communication.

Provisions

Free Flow of Information

This provision emphasizes “protecting and advancing” accurate and truthful information, as it “is essential to serving the public interest and contributing to informed decision-making in a democratic society.”

How This Code Provision Applies to Generative AI Tools	Example(s) of Improper Use	Guidance on Proper Use
Communication Outputs	A PR firm uses an AI tool to generate PR materials and collateral automatically without supervision. The resulting content spreads dated, false, or damaging information.	Maintain editorial oversight. Human judgment must guide review, approval, and framing. Validate the sources and factual accuracy of all AI-generated content before use, and avoid material that is inaccurate, discriminatory, in violation of intellectual property rights, or that discloses proprietary information. Require vendors and partners to disclose whether and how they use AI, including prompts and data sources, and evaluate how their practices might affect clients and outcomes. Disclose AI use when content is significantly shaped or created by such tools, especially in public-facing communication or when attribution is expected.

Competition

This provision emphasizes that “healthy and fair competition among professionals” fosters an ethical atmosphere and supports a “robust business environment.”

How This Code Provision Applies to Generative AI Tools	Example(s) of Improper Use	Guidance on Proper Use
Ideation Generation for RFPs	During a request for proposal (RFP), an agency feeds a competitor’s past campaign into an AI tool and asks it to “improve” the concept. The resulting proposal is essentially a reworked version of someone else’s strategy.	Use AI to accelerate brainstorming and test new directions, but ensure proposals represent original work and protect competitors’ intellectual property.
Content Creation & Distribution	A practitioner uses AI to replicate the messaging, style, and timing of a competitor’s successful campaign.	Use AI to generate fresh ideas, adapt content for different platforms, or test variations, while preserving originality and respecting competitors’ intellectual property to maintain a fair and innovative marketplace.

Disclosure of Information

This provision emphasizes that “open communication fosters informed decision making in a democratic society” and that trust is built by revealing all information needed for responsible decision making.

How This Code Provision Applies to Generative AI Tools	Example(s) of Improper Use	Guidance on Proper Use
Letter-Writing Campaigns	An organization uses AI to generate letters that appear to come from different people when they originate from a single source, creating a deceptive “astroturf” campaign.	Use AI to refine drafts, research what legislators care about, personalize letters, or serve as a grammar checker or editor, but do not use it to misrepresent public opinion.
Financial Reporting	A practitioner publishes an AI-generated analysis without verifying its accuracy, creating a misleading view of performance. A practitioner ignores financial information flagged by AI analysis and withholds those results to present a false picture of the organization’s performance.	Verify the accuracy of AI-generated analysis before publication, and disclose relevant results flagged by AI to provide a complete and truthful picture of organizational performance. Apply accountability by carefully evaluating both the tool and the data being analyzed.
Correcting Misinformation	A practitioner allows inaccurate information generated or amplified by AI to remain uncorrected on a website or in a media kit, or uses generative AI to create disinformation and deliberately mislead the public.	Use AI to detect and prevent misinformation and disinformation, while practicing digital hygiene, governance, training, media literacy, inoculation, fact-checking, and resilience in trust and credibility. Verify sources, demand corrections when falsehoods are found, such as through LLM trust and safety teams, and apply red-teaming techniques along with AI-assisted detection methods to strengthen defenses.

How This Code Provision Applies to Generative AI Tools	Example(s) of Improper Use	Guidance on Proper Use
Digital Impostors and Deepfakes	A practitioner employs AI to create fake accounts, chatbots, or impostors that pose as authentic voices, deceiving the public in online discussions or public hearings.	Use AI to detect and stop digital impostors, uphold honesty by calling out those who pretend to be something they are not, and collaborate with developers to counter increasingly realistic deepfakes. Stay ahead of evolving threats to protect truthful information.
Employee Monitoring	A practitioner uses an AI-powered sentiment analysis system to scan internal chat messages without employees' knowledge or consent, eroding trust and damaging organizational culture.	Ensure transparency by clearly communicating what data is collected and how it is used, and secure informed consent from employees before applying AI tools for retention or engagement analysis.

Safeguarding Confidences

This provision emphasizes the intent “to protect the privacy rights of clients, organizations, and individuals by safeguarding confidential information.”

How This Code Provision Applies to Generative AI Tools	Example(s) of Improper Use	Guidance on Proper Use
AI and Confidential Data	An employee accidentally leaks sensitive internal information by uploading it to a generative AI tool or agent. A practitioner uses generative AI to create a presentation that includes client trade secrets. A staff member uses a public AI tool to screen job applicants or draft recommendation letters by uploading unredacted resumes or personal documents, exposing sensitive information such as names, contact information, academic records, or employment history.	Do not upload confidential information, trade secrets, or unredacted personal documents into public AI tools. Use secure, vetted platforms that comply with privacy standards. Redact identifying details before uploading, and follow organizational data policies. Review data privacy and confidentiality rules to confirm whether AI use is permitted in specific scenarios. Choose AI systems that provide strong privacy safeguards, enterprise protections, or local data processing.

Enhancing the Profession

This provision emphasizes the goal for PR professionals to continually “strengthen the public’s trust in the profession.” Practitioners should foster “respect and credibility” for their work and “improve, adapt, and expand professional practices.”

How This Code Provision Applies to Generative AI Tools	Example(s) of Improper Use	Guidance on Proper Use
Content Without Credible Sources	AI writes a blog post about a medical issue without using credible sources.	Leverage AI to gather data and insights, but verify all sources before use. Form interdisciplinary teams to guide AI design, creation, and deployment, with PR professionals serving as the ethical conscience. Educate employees to think critically about ethical challenges and apply ethical guidelines when using AI. Maintain transparency about how AI is used and seek input from internal and external audiences.
Social Media Profiling and Manipulative Content	AI collects personal data from social platforms to profile individuals and create emotionally manipulative content.	Leverage AI to gather data and insights responsibly. Form interdisciplinary teams to guide AI design, creation, and deployment, with PR professionals serving as the ethical conscience. Educate employees to think critically about ethical challenges and apply ethical guidelines when using AI. Maintain transparency about how AI is used and seek input from internal and external audiences.
Bias in Automated Screening	An organization relies solely on AI to screen resumes for an advertised job, without reviewing whether the system excludes qualified candidates or reflects biases related to diversity, geography, language, or socioeconomic background.	Monitor AI systems for bias and ensure equitable treatment in all processes. Collaborate with HR to audit AI tools regularly, cleanse biased variables from training data, and involve diverse stakeholders to promote fairness and uphold public trust.

How To: Understand Regulations and Legal Implications

The Fine Print

The guidance in this document is intended as general information to support ethical AI use in PR and should not be interpreted as legal advice. Given the rapidly evolving regulatory landscape across different jurisdictions, practitioners facing specific legal questions should consult a qualified attorney in their respective regions. The regulatory environment surrounding AI is dynamic, with various states, countries, and international bodies actively enacting new laws and guidelines. Below are key legal considerations to keep in mind when integrating AI tools into PR practices:

- **Copyright:** Stay updated with the latest developments at copyright.gov/ai, especially regarding the creation, use, and ownership of AI-generated content. Courts and the U.S. Copyright Office have evaluated how much human contribution is needed in AI-generated content to qualify for copyright protection. AI cannot own itself, and if a work does not receive copyright protection, it is in the public domain, meaning anyone can use it.

A parallel issue with copyright is unintentional infringement of protected work. Because generative AI creates work drawn from other content, there is the potential for AI-generated work to be an infringement of other legally protected copyright. It is important for users to verify that the work they create does not infringe.
- **International Regulations:** For practitioners working internationally, be especially mindful of stringent regulations such as those enforced by the European Union, which impose strict requirements on transparency, data privacy, and AI accountability. The EU's AI Act, along with its [General Data Privacy Regulation](#) (GDPR), work together to regulate AI use, particularly regarding data privacy. It is essential to remember that in a globalized PR practice, U.S. law and regulations may not align with those in other jurisdictions.
- **Influencer Marketing and Disclosure:** The U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) mandates clear and conspicuous disclosure whenever AI is used to create or influence endorsements or content. All claims must be truthful, substantiated, and transparent to the audience. The FTC also prohibits the creation or sale of fake reviews, including those generated by AI tools.
- **State and Local Laws:** Be aware that some U.S. states have introduced or are considering AI-specific legislation. These laws can vary widely in scope and requirements, so local legal counsel is essential to ensure compliance. Recently, there have been a series of state laws passed largely around data privacy that provide a patchwork of regulations on AI within the U.S. This has created a call for comprehensive federal regulation on AI. However, it involves a protracted lawmaking process that may take time to materialize, if ever.
- **Trademarks and Branding:** The use of AI to generate trademarks—such as logos or brand names—presents risks, including inadvertent creation of marks similar to existing ones, potentially causing consumer confusion. Human oversight remains vital to evaluate and ensure the distinctiveness and legal clearance of AI-generated branding elements. The issue of trademarks underscores the need for AI users to evaluate the content they create and not overly rely on AI for verification.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Is it ethical to use AI to draft a press release or social post?

Yes - if the content is accurate, reviewed by a human, and aligned with PRSA's Code of Ethics. Always disclose when necessary.

Q: When is it necessary to disclose that AI was used?

Transparency isn't always a yes-or-no decision, and it exists on a continuum. Disclosure is critical when AI use could affect trust, transparency, or audience understanding about who created the content. If a press release includes AI-generated quotes or messaging, or if a client or journalist expects fully human authorship, transparency is essential.

If AI is used to support, not replace, your thinking and the final product is meaningfully shaped by human input, disclosure may not be required. Leaning toward transparency strengthens credibility and reflects our industry's commitment to honesty, fairness, and accountability.

Q: Can I use public AI tools for client work?

Only if the tool doesn't store or reuse inputs, and you're not entering confidential or proprietary data. When in doubt, use enterprise tools or closed systems.

Q: Should I tell my clients or employers that I'm using AI?

Transparency builds trust. Disclose AI use in deliverables or contracts, especially when the tool makes a meaningful contribution to the outcome.

Q: What are the risks of using AI for media outreach?

AI can produce inaccurate content, dilute authentic voices, and erode trust if it replaces human judgment in areas such as pitching, crisis response, or journalist engagement. These risks can harm relationships and credibility. Always fact-check AI outputs, ensure alignment with brand voice, and use AI as a support tool, pairing automation with human oversight.

Q: What are the risks of using AI for employee recruitment?

AI in hiring can introduce algorithmic bias and reduce transparency, potentially disadvantaging certain groups and damaging an employer's reputation. These issues can also raise legal and ethical concerns. Audit algorithms regularly, remove biased data, maintain human oversight, and clearly explain to candidates how AI is used, allowing for questions and feedback.

Q: What are the potential risks for using AI to support employee relations?

AI can infringe on privacy through excessive monitoring or misinterpret sentiment analysis, eroding trust and harming culture. Set clear limits on data collection, obtain informed consent, and combine AI insights with human context. Regularly review processes to ensure fairness and transparency, preserving trust and a positive workplace culture.

Q: Is AI-generated content protected by copyright?

It depends. Even when you do add your input, there's still a risk of unintentional infringement. AI-generated content may qualify for copyright protection only if it contains sufficient meaningful human input in the final product. U.S. copyright law requires a certain level of human creativity or authorship. When in doubt, document your creative role.

Generative AI tools draw from massive datasets and often don't disclose their sources. That means the content might borrow from copyrighted material without your knowledge. It's critical to add your original input, review the output carefully, and check for potential infringement.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

As relevant issues arise, the Board of Ethics and Professional Standards (BEPS) will provide guidance within the framework of the Code. The PRSA Board of Directors will then announce these guidelines through an Ethical Standard Advisory (ESA). ESAs are for informational purposes only and not for the purpose of providing legal advice.

ESAs may address the following topics:

Accountability

AI doesn't eliminate professional responsibility—it heightens it. Practitioners remain accountable for all content created or informed by AI tools, including its accuracy, fairness, and transparency. Any errors or inaccuracies that arise must be promptly and transparently addressed - not ignored. This commitment reflects the professional value of “Honesty” and the highest standards of accuracy and truth in serving those we represent and communicating with the public. It also aligns with the “Disclosure of Information” provision in the Code of Conduct. It reinforces our duty to build trust by providing the public with the necessary information for informed decision-making.

Whether it's fact-checking an output, disclosing AI use, or ensuring messages align with organizational values, accountability lies with us. The Code reinforces this: ethical practice means taking ownership of outcomes, no matter the technology involved.

Agentic AI

AI agents are already working across platforms, responding to headlines, coordinating messages, and managing real-time interactions. As they become more embedded in public communication, these tools will shape narratives, build engagement, and influence decisions faster than human teams can react. Because agents are goal-driven, their outputs focus on efficiency or visibility—sometimes at the expense of ethics. That makes human oversight essential. PR professionals must lead with strategy, values, and active governance, shaping systems of trust that guide how AI represents organizations and impacts public perception.

Our role is expanding. We're moving beyond message management into system design—governing voice, curating reputation, and embedding ethics and inclusion into every digital interaction. AI should act in ways that reflect the standards we set and the trust we aim to earn.

Cultural Misrepresentation

AI models do not reflect all perspectives equally, often leaning more heavily in one direction than another. For public relations professionals, this creates ethical concerns because uncritical use of AI outputs can unintentionally reinforce bias, ignore important voices, or misinterpret audiences. Practitioners need to remain aware of these risks, make deliberate efforts to mitigate them, and apply the Code to ensure communication is inclusive, accurate, and fair. Ultimately, responsibility lies with us, not the technology.

Environmental Stewardship

Over the last few years, the growth of the AI industry has made it clear that a tremendous amount of energy is required to develop and deploy these systems. With this increased demand for computing power, electricity to operate the systems, and water to cool the hardware, there are environmental and ethical implications. Practitioners must understand the environmental impacts of mining and fabrication, as well as the processes of training new models, running queries, and building new data centers, and how the Code applies to these activities.

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Tools

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