

Public Relations Society of America
Board of Ethics and Professional Standards
Ethics and Standards Case Study Series

Public Relations Ethics Case Study #2

**Representing Front Groups with Undisclosed Sponsors and
Engaging in Deceptive Practices While Representing a Front Group**

The agency you work for has been retained by a manufacturer of light-rail and subway cars to monitor public transit funding and identify local and regional government agencies with plans to develop or expand transportation systems. Among several strategies, the agency is responsible for organizing and managing citizen groups to influence the funding and political decision-making process regarding rail cars. The client does not want to be identified as the funder of Citizens Advocating for Affordable Transit (CAAT). A reporter who covers transit approaches you at a CAAT meeting and asks if one of your clients is backing CAAT and the identity of the client. You have a good and trusted relationship with this reporter but your boss has said that the agency will lose the client if its association with CAAT is publicly disclosed. What do you do?

1. Identify the ethical issues and/or conflicts.
2. Determine internal/external factors likely to influence your decision.
3. Choose key values that apply.
4. Consider parties who will be affected by your decision and evaluate the public relations professional's obligation to each one.
5. Select ethical principles to guide your decision making.
6. Make a decision and offer a brief rationale.

Guidance for Case Study #2

[Professional Standards Advisory PS-3:](#)

Representing Front Groups with Undisclosed Sponsors

PRA3 has been updated and consolidated with PSA-7. For details on the issue, including background, relevant sections of the Code, examples and recommended best practices, [see PSA-7](#).

[Professional Standards Advisory PS-7:](#)

Engaging in Deceptive Practices While Representing a Front Group

Representation of front groups with undisclosed sponsorships and/or deceptive or misleading descriptions of goals, causes, tactics, sponsors or participants. (Note: The term "Astroturfing" is often associated with unethical front group activities. Because Astroturf is a registered trademark, it is recommended that the term "front group" be used.)