GUIDELINES FOR APPLICATIONS: The IFCN Code of Principles

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BACKGROUND TO THE CODE

1. History of the Code of Principles

The plan to introduce a Code of Principles for fact-checkers was agreed at Global Fact 3 in Buenos Aires in June 2016. Formally launched on 15 September 2016, it was adopted by 35 organizations from 27 countries since when the number of signatories grew rapidly.

A system to verify that signatories follow the code was introduced early in 2019. And since then, dozens of signatory organizations have made hundreds of improvements between them in order to secure their verified status, changing how they operate from the way they publish the identity of their team or corrections policy to ensuring they use primary, not secondary, sources in reports.

More than 90 organizations operating on every continent (bar Antarctica), were verified as following the code and verified signatory status is seen as a quality standard by users and partners worldwide. The requirement by Facebook that the partners in the 3rd Party Fact-checking scheme it launched in early 2017 must be IFCN verified signatories has, rightly, brought greater public scrutiny to how the code is operated and policed.

2. The code's aims and the changes agreed

The Code of Principles was established with three key goals in mind:

1. To ensure users see and understand how the organizations operate, and do not have to take their word on trust.

2. To ensure fact checks are done in such a way that users can replicate the fact checks for themselves.

3. To thus assist the fact-checking organizations to earn trust; helping to distinguish them from other partisan actors.

To achieve these goals, and go further, IFCN signatories in 2019/2020 agreed to

1. Establish common baseline standards for methodology and sourcing
2. Better methodology for assessing non-partisanship in different contexts
3. A commitment to accuracy from the parent media of fact-checking units
4. Support for fact-checkers operating in "hostile" countries
5. A more rigorous system for verification of compliance across the whole code
6. A clear process for responding to violations of code

3. Protecting signatory status – the assessment system

Those awarded IFCN signatory status today have the power not only to *declare* claims that public figures and others make credible, or otherwise, but to reduce the claims' circulation – most notably on Facebook through the 3rd Party Fact-Checking programme

For this reason, signatories agreed changes in 2019/2020 to ensure our verification system is both more proactive and rigorous than was required previously.

1. **Detailed profiles of assessors**

- Evidence of his or her understanding of how fact-checking works
- His or her work profile
- Any work, political or other associations or memberships potentially relevant to issues that the fact-checkers they assess might regularly cover
- A statement on potential conflicts of interest assessing a particular factchecker before they are approved to do so

2. **A proactive and rigorous assessment process**

- Assessing adherence to the five principles by a larger range of criteria
- Expanding the number of fact checks assessed to test an applicant's non-partisanship
- More proactive investigation of the applicant's claims in other fields
- Withdrawal of the "partially compliant" rating

3. **Consistency in decisions across the IFCN network**

- The IFCN will monitor assessments made across the network to ensure that, while variations to reflect local conditions are inevitable and important, there is broad consistency in decisions.

4. **Feedback to assessors on board decisions**

- Where the director and advisory board disagree with the recommendation of the assessor, they will provide feedback explaining this decision.

<u>Ensuring the findings are available to the users</u>

One of the key goals of the Code of Principles is to enable users to hold fact-checking organizations to account for adhering to these agreed standards of transparency, non-partisanship, fairness and methodological rigour. To do this, it is important that users can read and understand the assessment, however currently IFCN applications and assessments are all written in English and if an organization's users do not read English, this means they cannot properly follow it. To resolve this problem, the IFCN encourages signatories to publish a summary of the assessment, written in the language of the website,

by the assessor and agreed with the applicant. Where organizations that operate in English prefer to link to the full assessment, they may do this instead.

Responding to claims of violations of the Code

The IFCN is not an appeals body but has responsibility to suspend or withdraw signatory status if it finds a signatory has seriously violated the code. Depending on the nature of the allegations made, the IFCN Director and Advisory Board will respond as follows:

1. **For a minor matter – a direct discussion**

If the IFCN Director and board are informed that a signatory has fallen short of the standards set in the code but judge (a) the infringement is real but not serious &/or systematic and (b) appears to result from a misinterpretation, not a wilful disregard, of the code, the IFCN will hold a direct discussion with the signatory about the issue, aimed at preventing repetition.

2. **If more serious – a public statement explaining the issue and steps agreed**

If the IFCN Director and board learn a signatory has violated one or more criteria of the code and the matter is serious enough to require corrective action and informing the public, the IFCN will discuss with the signatory and issue a statement explaining its stance and steps agreed to resolve the issue. This will also be noted in the annual report.

3. **If would take time to resolve – suspension for a period to allow that to happen**

If the IFCN Director and board learn a signatory has made a serious violation of the code and is willing to correct but needs time to do so, the IFCN may temporarily suspend signatory status to allow time for this to take place.

4. **If it appears serious – but the IFCN needs time to properly investigate an issue**

If the IFCN Director and board believe a signatory may have made a serious violation of the code but cannot agree a response with the signatory, it may suspend the signatory's signatory status to allow a fair investigation before deciding on action.

5. **If violation is serious and correction not possible – withdrawal of signatory status**

If the IFCN Director and board learn that a signatory has made a very serious violation of the code, the signatory sought to deliberately conceal required information in the application process, and the IFCN and signatory cannot agree on how to resolve the matter, the IFCN may withdraw verified signatory status. Organizations who have had signatory status withdrawn may not reapply sooner than two years.

Transparency report – providing proof of how the system is working

The IFCN will publish a report each year on the operation of the code, including complaints received and responses, providing evidence on the level of trust users can have in the verified signatories.

VERIFYING ELIGIBILITY & ADHERENCE TO THE FIVE KEY PRINCIPLES

1. Who is eligible to be a signatory?

It is agreed IFCN verified signatory status may only be granted to the following

IFCN signatory status may be granted to legally registered organizations[1] set up for the purpose of fact-checking[2] that regularly[3] publish non-partisan reports on the factual accuracy of statements by public figures and prominent institutions and widely circulated claims in text, visual and other formats focused primarily on claims related to public interest issues .[4] IFCN signatory status may not be granted to organizations whose editorial work is controlled by the state, a political party or politician.[5] It may however be granted to organizations that receive funding from state or political sources to carry out public service journalism if the IFCN assessor determines there is clear and unambiguous separation of editorial control from state or political influence.[6]

Key criteria

1. The applicant is a legally registered organization, or a distinct team or unit within a legally registered organization, and details of this are easily found on its website.
2. The team, unit or organization is set up exclusively for the purpose of fact-checking.
3. The applicant has published an average of at least one factcheck a week over the course of the six months prior to the date of application, or 12 months if operating in a country that is home to five or more existing verified signatories at the date of application.[7]

[1] See examples in the Appendix of how some current signatories prove this
[2] Applicants will be asked to provide evidence on motivation and track record.
[3] For interpretation of the term "regularly" see "Key criteria" 3 above on this page.
[4] Public interest issues might include, but would not be limited to, issues relating to the economy, education, the environment, governance and the functioning of the political system, individual and public health, and individual and public rights.
[5] See criteria 5. Judgement as to whether an organization provides state-funded but editorially independent public service journalism will be made, in the first instance, by the assessor on a case-by-case basis, in the context of the country concerned.
[6] See criteria 6. Nothing in these criteria automatically prohibits organizations from receiving funding from foreign embassies or politically aligned organizations where (a) that funding is not illegal in that country and (b) the statement shows how the organization ensures its funding does not influence the findings of the applicant's fact checks.
[7] The new regular publishing requirement will be in effect starting from June 1, 2020

4. On average, at least 75% of the applicant's fact checks focus on claims related to issues that, in the view of the IFCN, relate to or could have an impact on the welfare or well-being of individuals, the general public or society. [8]
5. The applicant's editorial output is not, in the view of the IFCN, controlled by the state, a political party or politician.
6. If the organization receives funding from local or foreign state or political sources, it provides a statement on its site setting out to the satisfaction of the IFCN, how it ensures its funders do not influence the findings of its reports.

To show you meet these criteria, applicants should:

1. Publish evidence that is verifiable and easy to access on your website that you are either a legally registered fact-checking organization or a distinct unit set up exclusively for the purposes of fact-checking within another legally registered organization.[9] See the Appendices p.17 for examples of how current signatories do this.

2. Provide information in the application form section about your organization's structure, motivation and purpose.

3. Provide a spreadsheet of links for the fact checks you published in the six months prior to the date of application showing that you have checked at least 26 claims in that time (or 52 claims in 12 months if you are applying from a country which already has at least five IFCN verified signatories at the date of application)[10].

4. Provide, in the spreadsheet of links for fact checks, the lead topic covered for each fact check you published over the six months prior to the date of application, and a brief overall summary of why you consider this shows that 75% or more of your fact checks focused on claims related to "public interest" issues, using the IFCN definition of public interest topics as: "issues that relate to or could have an impact on the welfare or well-being of individuals, the general public or society". (See examples in footnote.[11])

5. Provide a statement in the application about any commercial, financial and/or institutional relationship your organization has to the state, politicians or political parties in the country or countries you cover. This would include funding or support received from foreign as well as local state or political actors. Should you have any

[8] The IFCN director and the advisory board might provide with a waiver, if the applicant can justify why they failed to meet this particular criterion.
[9] Note, while the IFCN is happy to encourage any individual carrying out non-partisan fact-checking it does not have the capacity to assess the working practices of individuals.
[10] Please check the number of verified signatories from your country http://ifcncodeofprinciples.poynter.org or email factchecknet@poynter.org to make sure about the actual count.
[11] Public interest issues might include, but would not be limited to, issues relating to the economy, education, the environment, governance and the functioning of the political system, individual and public health, and individual and public rights.

such relationship, applicants should publish a statement on its site setting out how it ensures the editorial independence of its work.

2. The full text of the five key principles

Eligible organizations must also show compliance with the five key principles

Principle 1. A commitment to Non-partisanship and Fairness

Signatory organizations fact-check claims using the same high standards of evidence for equivalent claims. They do not concentrate their fact-checking unduly on any one side. They consider the reach and importance of the claims they select to check. They declare relevant interests. They follow the same essential process for every fact check and let the evidence dictate the conclusions. Signatories do not advocate or take policy positions on the issues they fact-check.

Principle 2. A commitment to Standards and Transparency of Source

Signatories provide enough details of all sources used to enable users to replicate their work, except in cases where a source's personal security could be compromised. In such cases, signatories provide as much detail as possible. Signatories use primary sources wherever possible and always check a contestable source against other sources. Signatories identify the interests of any sources they quote where those might reasonably be considered relevant to the claim fact checked.

Principle 3. A commitment to Transparency of Funding & Organization

Signatory organizations are transparent about their funding sources.* If they accept funding from other organizations, they ensure that funders have no influence over the conclusions the fact-checkers reach in their reports. Signatory organizations publish on their site the professional background of all key figures in the organization and explain the organizational structure, setting out how and by whom editorial control is exercised. Signatories may choose not to identify the authors of individual fact checks where editorial control is exercised by the senior editorial team. Signatories clearly indicate a way for users to communicate with them.

Principle 4. A commitment to Standards and Transparency of Methodology

Signatories work to the highest professional standards and explain the methodology they use to select, research, write and publish their fact checks. They encourage users to send claims to fact-check and are transparent on why and how they fact-check.

Principle 5. A commitment to an Open & Honest Corrections Policy

Signatories are committed to accuracy and publish and promote their corrections policy and follow it scrupulously. Where credible evidence proves they have made a mistake worthy of correction, they correct clearly and transparently in line with the corrections policy, seeking so far as possible to ensure that users see the corrected version. If the signatory is the fact-checking unit of a publishing or media company, it is a requirement of signatory status that the parent company has and adheres to an open and honest corrections policy.

3. Requirements for showing compliance

Assessors have responsibility for assessing adherence to the five IFCN principles, set out below, according to an agreed set of 25 criteria. Details of what is needed to do this, are set out on each page, below the criteria.

Principle 1. A commitment to Non-partisanship and Fairness

Signatory organizations fact-check claims using the same high standards of evidence for equivalent claims. They do not concentrate their fact-checking unduly on any one side. They consider the reach and importance of the claims they select to check. They declare relevant interests. They follow the same essential process for every fact check and let the evidence dictate the conclusions. Signatories do not advocate or take policy positions on the issues they fact-check.

Key criteria

1. The applicant fact-checks using the same high standards of evidence and judgement for equivalent claims regardless of who made the claim.
2. The applicant does not unduly concentrate its fact-checking on any one side, considers the reach and importance of claims it selects to check and publishes a short statement on its website to set out how it selects claims to check.
3. The applicant discloses in its fact checks relevant interests of the sources it quotes where the reader might reasonably conclude those interests could influence the accuracy of the evidence provided. It also discloses in its fact checks any commercial or other such relationships it has that a member of the public might reasonably conclude could influence the findings of the fact-check.
1. The applicant is not as an organization affiliated with nor declares or shows support for any party, any politician or political candidate, nor does it advocate for or against any policy positions on any issues save for transparency and accuracy in public debate.
4. The applicant sets out its policy on non-partisanship for staff on its site. Save for the issues of accuracy and transparency, the applicant's staff do not get involved in advocacy or publicise their views on policy issues the organization might fact-check in such a way as might lead a reasonable member of the public to see the organization's work as biased. [12]

To show they meet these criteria, applicants should:

1. Provide in your application a selection of 10 fact checks that you believe demonstrate your non-partisanship, and an explanation of how these show that you use the same high standards of evidence for equivalent claims, do not unduly concentrate your fact-checking on any one side, consider the reach and importance of the claims you

[12] The IFCN director and the advisory board might provide with a waiver, if the applicant can justify why they failed to meet this particular criterion.

select to check, follow the same essential process for every fact-check and let the evidence dictate your conclusions.

2. Publish a statement on your website about how you select claims to check, explaining, among whatever other points you wish to set out, how you ensure you do not unduly concentrate your fact-checking on any one side, and how you consider the reach and importance of the claims you select to check.

3. Ensure that in your fact checks you, as a rule, (i) disclose those interests of sources used where the reader might reasonably conclude those interests could influence the accuracy of the evidence provided (ii) disclose in your fact checks any commercial or other such relationships where a member of the public might reasonably conclude the relationship could influence the findings of the fact check.

4. Ensure that your organization does not affiliate with or show support for any political party, politician, political candidate or advocacy group nor advocate for or against any policy position on any issue other than transparency and accuracy in public debate. **Note:** if you are the fact-checking unit of a media organization, the media house's editorials and opinion pieces are not included in this restriction.

5. Publish on your website a statement setting out your policy on non-partisanship for staff and how it ensures you meet criterion 5.

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Principle 2. A commitment to Standards and Transparency of Sources

Signatories provide enough details of all sources used to enable users to replicate their work, except in cases where a source's personal security could be compromised. In such cases, signatories provide as much detail as possible. Signatories use the best available primary sources wherever possible and always check key claims against two or more sources save where only one source is relevant. Signatories identify the interests of any sources they quote where those might reasonably be considered relevant to the claim fact checked.

Key criteria

1. The applicant identifies the source of all significant evidence used in their fact checks, providing relevant links where the source is available online, in such a way that users can replicate their work if they wish. In cases where identifying the source would compromise the source's personal security, the applicant provides as much detail as compatible with the source's safety.
2. The applicant uses the best available primary, not secondary, sources of evidence wherever suitable primary sources are available. Where suitable primary sources are not available, the applicant explains the use of a secondary source.
3. The applicant checks all key elements of claims against more than one named source of evidence save where the one source is the only source relevant on the topic.

4. The applicant identifies in its fact checks the relevant interests of the sources it uses where the reader might reasonably conclude those interests could influence the accuracy of the evidence provided.

Assessors will be required to check for the following red flags in fact checks they review

5. The applicant regularly relies on anonymous, single, and/or secondary sources in circumstances where there is no justification for doing so.
6. The applicant regularly presents a secondary source as a primary source.
7. The applicant regularly fails to identify a source's interests needed to know its credibility.

To show they meet these criteria, applicants should:

1. Ensure that your organization identifies the source of all significant evidence used in its fact checks, providing relevant links where the source is available online, in such a way that users can replicate their work if they wish, save where identifying the source would compromise the source's personal security, in which case you provide as much detail as compatible with the source's safety.

2. Ensure that your organization uses the best quality primary sources available in its fact checks and, if secondary sources are used, that the reason for this is explained.

3. Ensure that your organization checks key claims in its fact checks against more than one source, save where the one source is the only source relevant on the topic.

4. Ensure that your organization identifies the relevant interests of the sources you use where a typical member of the public might reasonably conclude those interests could influence the accuracy of the evidence provided.

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Principle 3. A commitment to Transparency of Funding & Organization

Signatory organizations are transparent about their funding sources.[13] If they accept funding from other organizations, they ensure that funders have no influence over the conclusions the fact-checkers reach in their reports. Signatory organizations publish on their site the professional background of all key figures in the organization and explain the organizational structure, setting out how and by whom editorial control is exercised. Signatories may choose not to identify the authors of individual fact-checks where editorial control is exercised by the senior editorial team. Signatories clearly indicate a way for users to communicate with them.

[13] The IFCN will publish a caveat stating: **"*The IFCN Director and Advisory Board may, in the exceptional circumstance of a signatory facing closure or severe sanctions or risks if it discloses its sources of funding publicly, despite such funding being legal in the signatory's country, choose to waive the requirement for public financial disclosure if the signatory discloses such fully to the IFCN assessor. If such a decision is ever made, this will be publicly declared on the IFCN site, indicating the number of signatories affected*".**

Key criteria

1. Applicants that are independent organizations have a page on their website detailing each source of funding accounting for 5% or more of total revenue for its previous financial year. This page also indicates the legal form in which the organization is registered (e.g. as a non-profit, as a company etc). [14]
2. Applicants that are the fact-checking section or unit of a media house or other parent organization make a statement on ownership.
3. A statement on the applicant's website sets out the applicant's organizational structure and makes clear how and by whom editorial control is exercised.
4. A page on the applicant's website details the professional biography of all those who, according to the organizational structure and play a significant part in its editorial output. [15]
5. The applicant provides easy means on its website and/or via social media for users to communicate with the editorial team.

Assessors will be required to check for the following red flags in their assessment

6. That the signatory conceals from its users, or the IFCN, the identity of people who exercise significant control over the organization.
7. That the signatory uses pseudonyms for its team members.
8. Noting that there is no requirement to publish details of the organization's physical address, it would be a red flag if the organization were to publish a false address.

To show they meet these criteria, applicants should:

1. In your application, identify whether your organization is an "independent organization" or "the fact-checking section or unit of a media house or other parent organization," providing proof of this legal/organizational status.
2. If your organization is an "independent organization", publish on your website information detailing each source of funding accounting for 5% or more of total revenue for its previous financial year. This page must also indicate on this page the legal form in which the organization is registered (e.g. as a non-profit, as a company etc).
3. If your organization is the fact-checking section or unit of a media house or other parent organization, you should publish a statement on your website about your ownership.
4. Set out on your website your organizational structure, making clear how and by whom editorial control is exercised.
5. Publish on your website the professional biographies of those who play a significant part in your organization's editorial output.

[14] The IFCN director and the advisory board might provide with a waiver, if the applicant can justify why they failed to meet this particular criterion.

[15] While regular authors of the signatory's fact checks must be listed on the site, if ultimate responsibility for fact checks rests in practice with the senior editorial team and the signatory believes either that the ethnic, religious, gender or other identity of the author of an article may cause the article to be unfairly pre-judged, or that putting the author's name on the fact-checks could lead to online or physical abuse and threats, the name of the author can be kept off the reports. However, pseudonyms may not be used.

6. Publish on your website and/or via social media an easy means for users to communicate with the editorial team.
7. Ensure your organization does not (i) conceal from its users or the IFCN the identity of people who exercise significant control over the organization (ii) use pseudonyms for its team members and (iii) publish a false address for its offices.

Principle 4. A commitment to Standards and Transparency of Methodology

Signatories work to the highest professional standards and explain the methodology they use to select, research, write and publish their fact checks. They encourage users to send claims to fact-check and are transparent on why and how they fact-check.

Key criteria

1. The applicant publishes on its website a statement about the methodology it uses to select, research, write and publish its fact checks.
2. The applicant selects claims to check based primarily on the reach and importance of the claims, and where possible explains the reason for choosing the claim to check.
3. The applicant sets out in its fact checks relevant evidence that appears to support the claim as well as relevant evidence that appears to undermine it. [16]
4. The applicant in its fact checks assesses the merits of the evidence found using the same standards applied to evidence on equivalent claims, regardless of who made the claim.
5. The applicant seeks where possible to contact those who made the claim to seek supporting evidence, noting that (i) this is often not possible with online claims, (ii) if the person who makes the claim fails to reply in a timely way this should not impede the fact check, (iii) if a speaker adds caveats to the claim, the fact-checker should be free to continue with checking the original claim, (iv) fact-checkers may not wish to contact the person who made the claim for safety or other legitimate reasons.
6. The applicant encourages users to send in claims to check, while making it clear what readers can legitimately expect will be fact-checked and what isn't fact-checkable.

Assessors will be required to check for the following red flags in fact checks they review

7. That the fact checks regularly make assumptions, without evidence, about the intentions of the person who made the claim.
8. That the fact checks regularly take statements made by any source at their word, without checking.
9. That the fact checks regularly accept the findings of any data sources, official or otherwise, or studies without first checking their methodology.
10. That the fact checks regularly includes a significant amount of loaded or partisan language.

[16] The IFCN director and the advisory board might provide with a waiver, if the applicant can justify why they failed to meet this particular criterion.

To ensure that the organization meets these criteria, applicants should:

1. Publish on your website a statement about the methodology your organization uses to select, research, write and publish your fact checks.
2. Ensure that your organization does apply in practice the policy you set out on your site about how you select claims to check, selecting claims primarily on the reach and importance of the claims, and explaining where possible the reasons for choosing the claim to check
3. Ensure that, as a rule, your organization sets out in your fact checks evidence that support the claims as well as evidence that undermines it.
4. Ensure that your organization always assesses the merits of any evidence found using the same standards applied to evidence on equivalent claims, regardless of who made the claim.
5. Ensure that your organization seeks where possible to contact those who made the claim to seek supporting evidence, noting that (i) this is often not possible with online claims, (ii) if the person who makes the claim fails to reply in a timely way this should not impede the factcheck, (iii) if a speaker adds caveats to the claim, the factchecker should be free to continue with checking the original claim, (iv) fact-checkers may not wish to contact the person who made the claim for safety or other legitimate reasons.
6. Ensure that in its fact checks, your organization does not (i) make assumptions, without evidence, about the intentions of the person who made the claim (ii) take statements made by any source at their word, without checking (iii) accept the findings of any data sources, official or otherwise, or studies without first checking their methodology (iv) include a significant amount of loaded or partisan language.
7. Encourage users to send in claims to check, while making it clear what readers can legitimately expect will be fact-checked and what isn't fact-checkable.

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Principle 5. A commitment to an Open & Honest Corrections Policy

Signatories are committed to accuracy and publish and promote their corrections policy and follow it scrupulously. Where credible evidence proves they have made a mistake worthy of correction, they correct clearly and transparently in line with the corrections policy, seeking so far as possible to ensure that users see the corrected version. If the signatory is the fact-checking unit of a publishing or media company, the parent company must also have and adhere to an open and honest corrections policy.

Key Criteria

1. The applicant has a corrections or complaints policy that is easily visible and accessible on the organization's website or frequently referenced in broadcasts.

2. The policy sets out clear definitions of what it does and does not cover, how major mistakes, especially those requiring revised conclusions of a fact check, are handled, and the fact that some complaints may justify no response. This policy is adhered to scrupulously.
3. Where credible evidence is provided that the applicant has made a mistake worthy of correction, the applicant makes a correction openly and transparently, seeking as far as possible to ensure that users of the original see the correction and the corrected version.
4. The applicant, if an existing signatory, should either on its corrections/complaints page or on the page where it declares itself an IFCN signatory inform users that if they believe the signatory is violating the IFCN Code, they may inform the IFCN, with a link to the IFCN site. [17]
5. If the applicant is the fact-checking unit of a media company, it is a requirement of signatory status that the parent media company has and adheres to an open and honest corrections policy.

To ensure that the organization meets these criteria, applicants should:

1. Publish on its website a corrections or complaints policy that is easily visible and accessible to the user. If the applicant is primarily a broadcaster, it should frequently reference its corrections policy in broadcasts.
2. Ensure that the corrections or complaints policy sets out clear definitions of what it does and does not cover, how major mistakes, especially those requiring revised conclusions of a fact check, are handled, and the fact that some complaints may justify no response.
3. Provide a short statement in the application about how the policy was adhered to over the previous year (or six months if this is the first application) including evidence of two examples of the responses provided by the applicant to a correction request over the previous year. Where no correction request has been made in the previous year, the applicant must state this in its application, which will be publicly available in the assessment if its application is successful.
4. If the applicant is an existing signatory, it must either on its corrections page or the page where it declares itself an IFCN signatory, inform users that if they believe the signatory is violating the IFCN Code, they may inform the IFCN of this, with a link to the complaints page on the IFCN site.
5. If the applicant is the fact-checking unit of a media company, the parent media company must have and adhere to an open and honest corrections policy and the applicant must provide evidence of this in its application.

[17] The IFCN director and the advisory board might provide with a waiver, if the applicant can justify why they failed to meet this particular criterion.

The ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

The IFCN works with independent assessors – normally either journalism lecturers or respected senior or retired journalists – to verify applicants' compliance with the Code of Principles, relying on their understanding of fact-checking, the IFCN and the particular circumstances of the political and media world in the country concerned.

To ensure there is fairness across the network, the assessments made by these assessors are reviewed by the IFCN Director and an advisory board, who vote on applications. No member of the advisory board may vote on an application by the organization they represent. Board members are asked to resile themselves from any other votes that present a conflict of interest. Board votes are final.

To provide due transparency on the process

1) The IFCN provides information on its site, about the assessors it uses, setting out
    - Evidence of their understanding of how fact-checking works
    - Their work profiles
    - Any work, political or other associations or memberships potentially relevant to issues that the fact-checkers they assess might regularly cover
2) Before approving an assessor to assess a particular factchecker, the IFCN requires them to sign a statement on potential conflicts of interest relating to that fact-checker.

To ensure greater rigour and consistency between assessments

Applicants will be found either "compliant" or "not-compliant" with the five key principles and the eligibility section. "Partially compliant" will be an option only if the guidelines provide the IFCN discretion in assessment of a particular criteria.

1) The IFCN will monitor assessments made across the network to ensure that, while variations to reflect local conditions are inevitable and important, there is broad consistency in decisions across the network.
2) Where the director and advisory board disagree with the recommendation of the assessor, they will provide feedback to the assessor on the decision.

To ensure the system is transparent for users

The final reports of the assessor, after all changes have been made and confirmed, and following review by the board, are made public in English on the IFCN website.

The IFCN will also encourage signatories to publish a summary of the assessment, written in the language of its website, prepared by the assessor and agreed with the applicant. Where organizations that operate in English prefer to link to the full assessment, they may do this instead.

APPENDICES – GUIDELINES FOR APPLICATIONS

1. Proving eligibility to apply – proof of legal status

To meet this requirement, applicants are required to publish on their websites information that is easy for users to find setting out details of their status "as a legally registered organization, or a distinct team or unit within a legally registered organization".

Information about the legal status of the organization, or the team structure if the applicant is a distinct team within another organization, should be set out clearly and be easy to find – one or two clicks from the pages where fact checks are run.

See examples and links showing how this has been done by four existing verified signatories.

(i) A non-profit trust

- **Legal status set out in a page in Africa Check's "About us" section:** https://africacheck.org/about-us/how-we-are-funded/



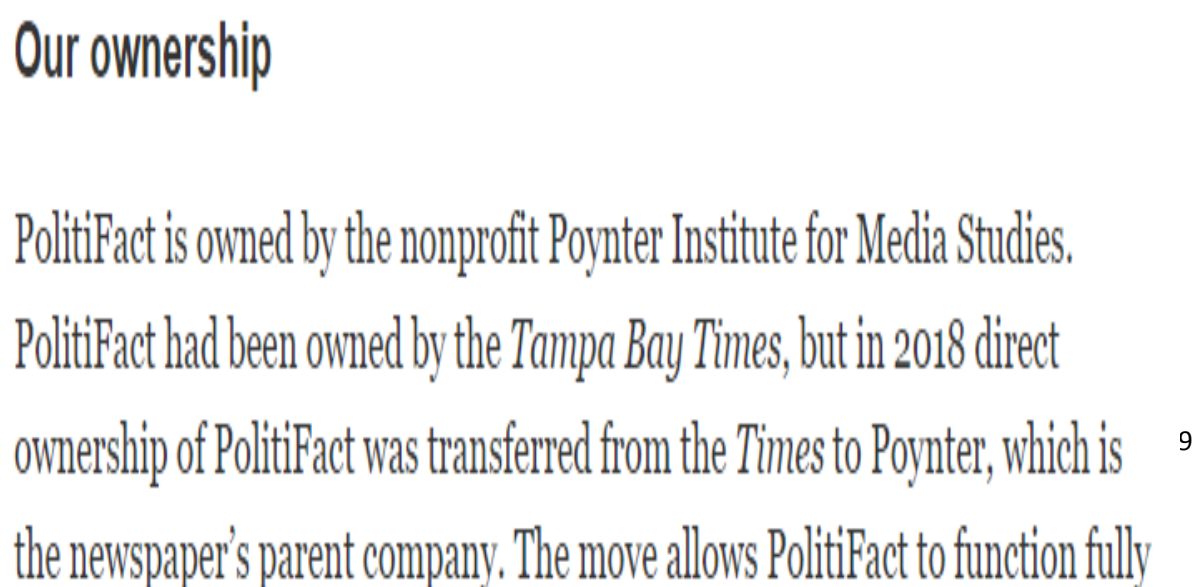
Diversity & transparency of funding

As a leading supporter of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) and its Code of Principles, Africa Check is committed to transparency about our funding and organisation.

Africa Check is a non-profit organisation, headquartered in South Africa as a non-profit Trust, registration number IT000728/2015(C). It is registered as Africa Check Foundation in Kenya and operates in Nigeria and Senegal through representative offices. Founded in London in 2012 as a Community Interest Company, control of the organisation passed to the SA-registered Trust at the start of 2019. Information on 2012-2017 accounts is available on this link at UK Companies House. 2018 accounts will be added once audited. 2019 accounts will be published in South Africa.

(ii) A non-profit news organization owned by a non-profit institute

- **Legal status set out in Politifact's "About us"** https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/feb/12/principles-truth-o-meter-politifacts-methodology-i/#Our%20ownership

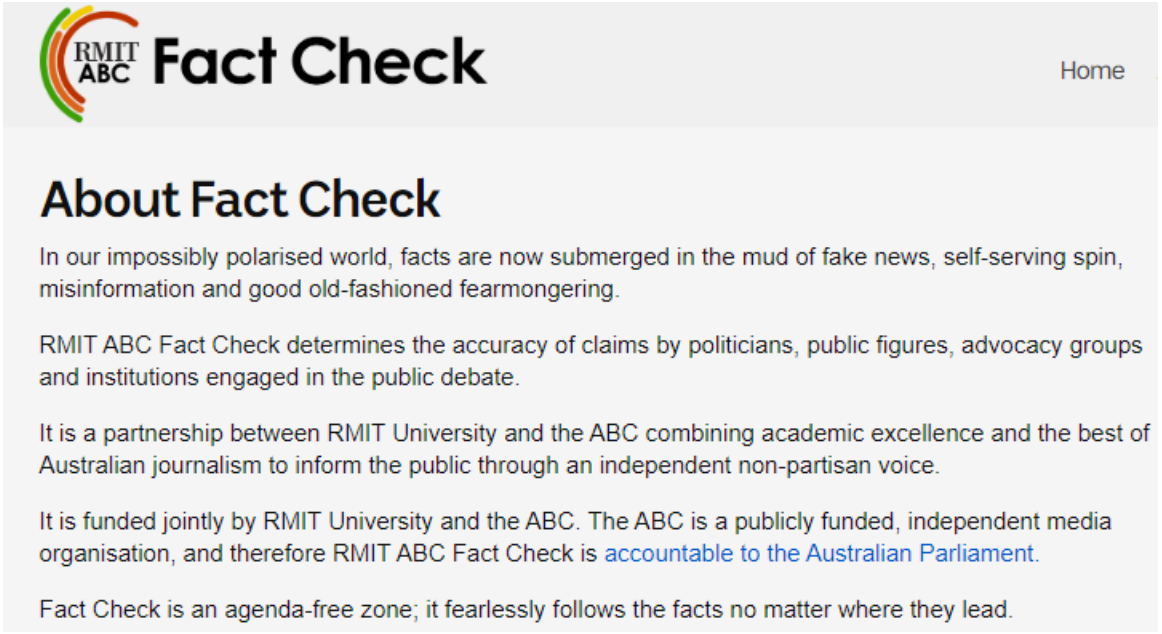


Our ownership

PolitiFact is owned by the nonprofit Poynter Institute for Media Studies. PolitiFact had been owned by the *Tampa Bay Times*, but in 2018 direct ownership of PolitiFact was transferred from the *Times* to Poynter, which is the newspaper's parent company. The move allows PolitiFact to function fully

(iii) A fact-checking unit of a media house

- **The "About Fact Check" section of RMIT-ABC FactCheck**
  https://www.abc.net.au/news/factcheck/about/



RMIT ABC Fact Check

Home

About Fact Check

In our impossibly polarised world, facts are now submerged in the mud of fake news, self-serving spin, misinformation and good old-fashioned fearmongering.

RMIT ABC Fact Check determines the accuracy of claims by politicians, public figures, advocacy groups and institutions engaged in the public debate.

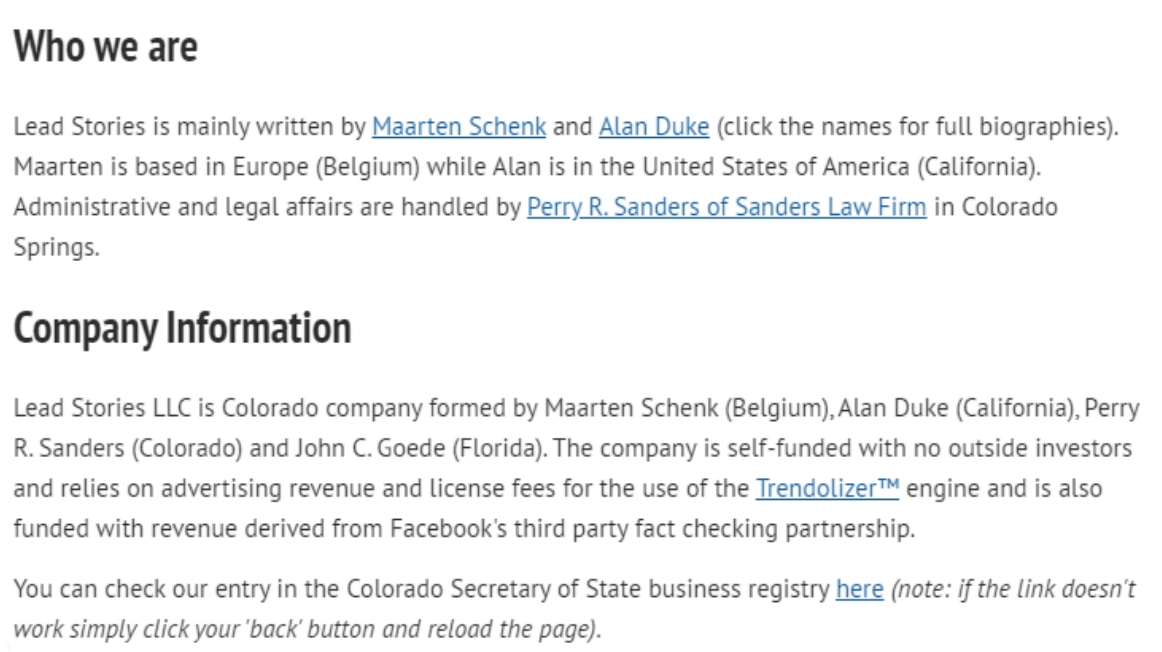
It is a partnership between RMIT University and the ABC combining academic excellence and the best of Australian journalism to inform the public through an independent non-partisan voice.

It is funded jointly by RMIT University and the ABC. The ABC is a publicly funded, independent media organisation, and therefore RMIT ABC Fact Check is accountable to the Australian Parliament.

Fact Check is an agenda-free zone; it fearlessly follows the facts no matter where they lead.

(iv) An independent for-profit company

- **The "About" section of Lead Stories**
  https://leadstories.com/about.html



Who we are

Lead Stories is mainly written by Maarten Schenk and Alan Duke (click the names for full biographies). Maarten is based in Europe (Belgium) while Alan is in the United States of America (California). Administrative and legal affairs are handled by Perry R. Sanders of Sanders Law Firm in Colorado Springs.

Company Information

Lead Stories LLC is Colorado company formed by Maarten Schenk (Belgium), Alan Duke (California), Perry R. Sanders (Colorado) and John C. Goede (Florida). The company is self-funded with no outside investors and relies on advertising revenue and license fees for the use of the Trendolizer™ engine and is also funded with revenue derived from Facebook's third party fact checking partnership.

You can check our entry in the Colorado Secretary of State business registry here *(note: if the link doesn't work simply click your 'back' button and reload the page).*

2. Proving eligibility to apply – proof your organization is "set up exclusively for the purpose of fact-checking"

To confirm that applicants are eligible to apply, assessors must be able to confirm that an applicant – whether it is a standalone organization or a distinct team or unit within another organization – was set up and operates "exclusively for the purpose of fact-checking".

To assist assessors in determining this, the application form requires answers from all applicants to four questions. These may be updated from time to time.

(i) When and why was your fact-checking operation started? [18]
(ii) How many people work or volunteer in the organization and what are their roles?[19]
(iii) What different activities does your organization carry out?[20]
(iv) What are the goals of your fact-checking operation over the coming year?[21]

3. Proving eligibility to apply – proof your editorial work is not "controlled by the state, a political party or politician" and – if you receive funding from a state or political actor – of clear separation of editorial control from state or political influence

Applicants will be asked in their application to list and describe

(i) any official and/or funding relationship you have to the state, politicians or political parties in the country or countries you cover,
(ii) if your organization receives funding from local or foreign state or political sources, how you ensure the editorial independence of your work.

The answers provided would be expected to include, but need not be limited to, any charter or charters for editorial independence you have signed up to, evidence of the existence of any sort of requirements of editorial independence written into funding contracts or employment, and evidence of the existence and work of oversight committees. Organizations with or managed or overseen by individuals with close current political associations should declare this. Concealing such information would be seen as a red flag by the assessor. You should also ensure a statement explaining how your organization ensures the editorial independence of your work is published on your website.

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[18] To answer this question, you should explain what triggered, or led to, the creation of the organization, what motivates it, and describe its mission.
[19] To answer this question, please broadly describe the number and roles of staff and volunteers. The assessor does not need detail but simply an overview of the shape of the organization. For example, this might be X staff work as researchers/fact-checkers, Y staff work in social media and Z staff work in admin and fundraising.
[20] To answer this question, you should set out the main activities of the organization. There is no need to list routine admin and fundraising work. Activities that would fall under the broad umbrella of fact-checking could include researching and publishing fact checks, training in fact-checking, media and information literacy work, developing technologies in support of fact-checking, and advocacy around accuracy in public debate.
[21] The assessor does not want or need to know your detailed plans, let alone any plans that are commercially confidential, but to answer this question and enable their assessment they do need to understand broad goals for the coming year.

4. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 1 – That the applicant uses the same high standards of evidence and judgement for equivalent claims regardless of who made the claim

To ensure that assessors can assess compliance with this and other principles, applicants will be required to send in your application links to 10 fact checks published over the previous 6 months to one year, along with an explanation of why they, both individually and as a group, provide evidence of your non-partisanship and high standards.

Assessors will be asked to also select a further 10 fact checks (more if they wish) at random to verify these claims.

The explanation provided by the applicant should include how the links provided show that your organization uses the same high standards of evidence and judgement for equivalent claims regardless of who made the claim.

Potential red flags that assessors are asked to watch out for and investigate include:

(i) A pattern whereby a source is deemed to be credible as a test of a claim by one side, but not as a test of an identical or very similar claim from another side,
(ii) A pattern is seen whereby identical or very similar errors made in claims by different sides in any issue are treated differently in the applicants' conclusions or verdicts,
(iii) Loaded or partisan language is consistently used to dismiss or cast doubt on claims by one side of any particular debate.

Before declaring there is a pattern of similar claims being treated in different ways depending on who makes the claim, assessors would be required to discuss and understand the applicant's perspective.

5. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 1 – the applicant publishes a statement on its website to set out how it selects claims, does not unduly concentrate its fact-checking on any one side, and considers the reach and importance of the claims it checks

To prove compliance with this principle, applicants would be required to

(i) Provide the link to the statement on your website that sets out (i) the criteria by which you select claims to be checked, (ii) how you ensure that you do not unduly concentrate your fact-checking on any one side, and (iii) how you consider the reach and importance of the claims you check.
(ii) Applicants will be required to provide in your applications a searchable spreadsheet of claims checked over the previous six months.

(iii) Applicants will be required to provide in your applications evidence about the number and type of claims checked, how they were selected, and how this shows you consider the reach and importance of claims you select to check.

Issues assessors will consider in judging compliance with this criterion

The IFCN recognises that in countries around the world, rival politicians, political parties and institutions do not often make the same number of checkable claims as each other. It would be convenient for fact-checkers if they were to do so, but the reality is that around the world, rival politicians and parties almost always to differ in the way they communicate. Some politicians and some parties make many times more checkable claims than their rivals and to systematically check the same number of claims from each "side" regardless of how many claims are actually made would be to present a false balance.

The IFCN also recognises that the importance of checking claims varies with the reach of the claim,[22] the importance of the topic[23] and the authority or influence of those making it.[24]

During election campaigns, it is to be expected therefore that fact-checkers tend to focus limited resources more on claims from the major parties, at the expense, at times, of checking claims from the more minor parties. And outside election periods, it is to be expected that fact-checkers would tend to focus more on claims made those who hold power – central and powerful local government – than those in opposition.

Given the greatly different political and media contexts in which IFCN signatories work, there is no simple formula assessors can apply to determine what constitutes fair balance (or "not unduly concentrating" on any one side) and how applicants should take the reach and importance of the claims they check into account. It will be for each applicant to make its case that it abides by this principle and each assessor to summarise their review of the evidence in their report to the IFCN director and board.

6. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 1 – whether the applicant, as a rule, discloses in its fact checks relevant interests of the sources it quotes or commercial or other relationships it has

To meet this criterion, applicants should

(i) Ensure that when publishing or broadcasting their fact checks, your fact-checkers consider whether the sources they quote have interests that might lead a reasonable member of the public to conclude the source's evidence could be influenced by their interests and, if so, disclose those interests in the fact checks. [25]

[22] i.e. the actual or potential audience via TV or radio, or online virality
[23] i.e. the potential impact the claim if were to be false and believed, or vice versa, on the welfare or well-being of individuals, the general public or society.
[24] If a claim is made by a president, prime minister or prominent opposition leader it would normally be expected to have more weight in public debate than if made by a low ranking official or an ordinary member of the public.
[25] For example, if a source is a former government official or a known advocate for a related cause or issue, this should be described.

(ii) Ensure that your fact-checkers consider whether any of the commercial or other relationships your organization has with individuals or organizations that might lead a reasonable member of the public to conclude they could have influence on the findings of your factcheck, and if so, disclose this relationship in the factcheck.

7. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 1 – the applicant does not, as an organization, show support for any political party, politician or political candidate or advocacy group, nor advocate for or against policy positions save for transparency and accuracy

To meet this requirement, you should ensure your organization does not, as an organization, affiliate with or show support – on its site, in social media feeds or elsewhere – for any political party, politician or political candidate or advocacy group, nor advocate for or against any policy positions save for transparency and accuracy.

Note: your organization is the fact-checking unit of a media organization, the media house's editorials and opinion pieces would not be included in the assessment.

8. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 1 – the applicant has a policy on the non-partisanship of its staff and its staff do not get involved in advocacy or publicise their own position

To meet this requirement your organization should

(i) Publish on its website details of its policy ensuring that "the applicant's staff do not get involved in advocacy, or state policy positions, on issues the organization might factcheck in such a way as might lead a reasonable member of the public to see the organization's work as biased."

Note, to assess compliance assessors will review a randomised sample of posts the fully publicly available social media accounts of key staff at the applicant who have direct involvement in or control over its editorial operations, and be asked to consider the cross-range of posts they assess show a clear pattern of staff who are involved in or with control over editorial output declaring policy positions or support for politicians or others, in such a way that might lead a reasonable member of the public to see the organization's work as biased (note emphasis).

For guidance, if 10 percent or more of the posts sampled tackled political issues, and ALL of the posts on those issues indicated staff support on one side of the argument, that could be considered likely to indicate bias within the organization.

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9. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 2 – the applicant identifies all sources of significant evidence in a way that users can replicate, save where doing so would compromise the source's safety

To meet the requirements for this criterion, applicants should:

(i) Ensure that your fact-checkers provide details of the source of all significant evidence used in your fact checks, providing links where the source is available online, in such a way that users can replicate your work if they wish,

(ii) In cases where identifying the source would compromise the source's personal security, provide as much detail as is compatible with the source's safety.

10. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 2 – the applicant uses the best available primary sources and explains when secondary sources have to be used

To meet the requirements for this criterion, applicants should:

(i) Ensure that your fact-checkers use the best quality primary sources for all significant evidence used in your fact checks, wherever this is available

(ii) Where only secondary sources are available, provide explanation for this.

11. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 2 – the applicant checks all key elements of claims against more than one source, save where only one is relevant

To meet the requirements for this criterion, applicants should:

(i) Ensure that two or more sources are used as evidence, for those key claims, save in cases where only one source is relevant.

For example, in the US it would in most instances be acceptable to cite just one source (the US Labor Department) as a source on employment data, since it is the data-gathering source and the data provide generally seen as credible.

12. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 2 – the applicant identifies the relevant interests of sources they use

The requirements for compliance with this criterion are set out above in point 6.

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13. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 3 – the type of organization

To meet the requirements for this criterion, applicants will be asked in their application to identify themselves as either “an independent organization” or “the fact-checking section or unit of a media company or other parent organization” and provide a link to their supporting evidence. This should enable assessors to verify the type of organization.

14. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 3 – financial transparency for “independent organizations”

If the applicant is an “independent organization”, to meet the requirements for this criterion, applicants should:

(i) Ensure that your website has a page setting out total income and naming each source of funding accounting for 5% or more of total revenue for its previous financial year.

(ii) Ensure that the page also indicates the legal form in which the organization is registered (e.g. as a non-profit, as a company etc). This can be where your organization sets out that information required under the eligibility criteria.

(iii) Confirm in your application whether your organization has audited accounts that are publicly available, and if so provide them in your application.

Please note these caveats

(i) If your organization is newly formed and has not completed accounts for a full financial year at the time of the application, or if your financial year end has passed but your accounts are not yet completed, you should provide draft figures for income to date and the identities of funders accounting for more than 5% as well as information on spending to the assessor, and commit to making your final financial figures public on your website within three months of the end of your financial year end. Failure to do so could lead to suspension of signatory status.

(ii) Applicants will be able to indicate in their application that they believe they face the threat of closure or severe sanctions or other risks if they disclose their sources of funding publicly, despite it being legal, along with evidence to support this claim. In such cases, the IFCN Director and Advisory Board will determine whether they should be allowed to waive the requirement for public financial transparency required of other independent organizations that apply. If this is approved, the IFCN Director will confirm to the assessor and how to proceed.

15. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 3 – transparency about ownership for fact-checking sections or units of other organizations

If your organization is confirmed as the fact-checking section or unit of a media house or other parent organization, you should make a statement on your website about your ownership.

16. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 3 – transparency about the organization structure and by whom editorial control is exercised

To meet the requirements for this criterion, applicants should:

(i) Set out on your website an explanation of your organizational structure, making clear how and by whom editorial control is exercised. The goal of this criteria is to ensure that users understand who – of those identified on your team page as working or otherwise involved with the organization – exercises or is in the position to exercise editorial control over your fact-checking work and broadly how this is done.

(ii) If you choose not to by-line your fact checks, for reasons set out in **point 17** you should indicate on your website how the senior editorial team takes responsibility for all fact checks. The explanation need not be highly detailed.

17. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 3 – providing the professional profile of key players in the editorial output

To meet the requirements for this criterion, applicants should:

(i) Publish a page on your website providing the professional profiles of all those identified as having and exercising significant editorial control. This should include senior management, editors and regular contributors to the output.

(ii) Note that while regular authors of the applicant's fact checks must be listed on this page, if ultimate responsibility for fact checks rests in practice with the senior editorial team and the signatory believes either that the ethnic, religious, gender or other identity of the author of an article may cause the article to be unfairly pre-judged, or that putting the author's name on the fact checks could lead to online or physical abuse and threats, the name of the author can be kept off the reports. However, pseudonyms may not be used

(iii) Note – if the assessor concludes that key information was concealed, or pseudonyms or false addresses were used due to a misunderstanding of IFCN requirements, the application can still proceed if these are corrected. If the assessor concludes they were a deliberate attempt to subvert the verification process by concealing or misidentifying individuals, they will inform the IFCN which may decide to bar the application.

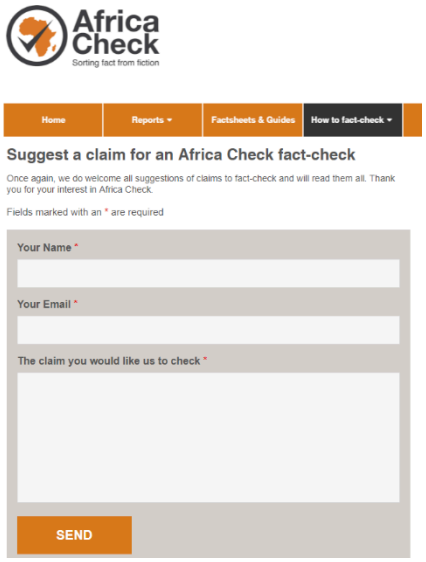
18. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 3 – that the applicant makes it easy for users to communicate with the team

To meet the requirements for this criterion, applicants should provide easy means on your website and/or via social media for users to communicate with the editorial team.

See some examples below for how some current signatories comply with this criterion – with messages on their home page:



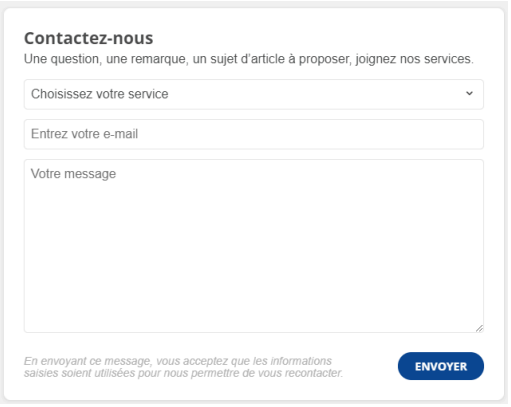
Or appeals to users to send in claims to factcheck – via the website, or on WhatsApp or other media – like this:





Or this from French fact-checkers **20Minutes**





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19. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 4 – the applicant selects claims to check primarily on the reach and importance of the claims

The way for applicants to meet the requirements for this criterion is already covered under compliance with the criteria for Principle 1 on the selection of claims.

20. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 4 – the applicant sets out evidence that supports and evidence that undermines a claim

To meet the requirements of this criterion, applicants should:

(i) Ensure that, as a general rule, in its fact checks, it sets out relevant evidence provided by a speaker in support of a claim, as well as relevant that might appear to undermine it, before determining which is correct.
(ii) Note: this approach is of course not suitable for every factcheck, but where it can be applied appropriately, will help ensure that those who see or hear the factcheck know all appropriate sources of evidence have been checked and support claims of non-partisanship.

21. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 4 – the applicant assesses the merits of evidence used by the same standards regardless of who made the claim

The way for applicants to meet the requirements for this criterion is already covered under compliance with the criteria for Principle 1 on use of the same standards to check evidence regardless of who made the claims.

22. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 4 – the applicant where possible contacts those who made the claim

The IFCN believes that contacting those who make claims to seek any evidence the speaker might have that supports the claim is good practice in general, as it helps show fairness to all sides, and can assist the factchecker to understand the reasons a claim is made.

As a rule, applicants should seek to comply with this criterion in their fact checks, noting that the assessors have been informed that the IFCN understands that

(i) it is often not possible with online claims to contact those who made the claim
(ii) on or offline, many people and institutions fail to reply in a timely way, and their failure to do so should not be allowed in any way to impede the factcheck,
(iii) if a speaker adds caveats to the claim when contacted, the applicant should be able to continue with checking the original claim that was circulated.

(iv) There applicant may not wish to contact the person who made the claim for safety or other legitimate reasons.

23. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 4 – required methodological standards in general

To meet the requirements of this criterion, applicants should:

i. Ensure that their fact checks do not regularly make assumptions, without evidence, about the intentions of the person who made the claim.
ii. Ensure that their fact checks do not regularly take statements made by any source at their word, without checking.
iii. Ensure that their fact checks do not regularly accept the findings of any data sources, official or otherwise, or studies without first checking their methodology.
iv. Ensure that their fact checks regularly includes a significant amount of loaded or partisan language.

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24. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 5 – the applicant has an easily accessed and clear corrections or complaints policy

To meet the requirements of this criterion, applicants should:

(i) Ensure that it posts a corrections or complaints policy that is easily visible and accessible on the organization's website or frequently references it in broadcasts if it is a broadcaster.
(ii) Ensure that the policy sets out clear definitions of what it does and does not cover, how major mistakes, especially those requiring revised conclusions of a fact check, are handled, and the fact that some complaints may justify no response.
(iii) Ensure that this policy is adhered to scrupulously.

To provide proof if the third of these points, the applicant will be required to provide a short report to the assessor, with evidence, showing how it adhered to the corrections policy over the previous year.

As part of this, the applicant should provide in its application details of two examples of the responses provided by the signatory to a correction request over the previous year. Where no correction request has been made in the previous year, the signatory must state this in its application, a summary of which will be publicly available if the application is successful.

25. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 5 – the applicant, if an existing signatory, enables users to inform the IFCN if they believe the signatory is violating the Code

If the applicant is already an existing signatory, it will be asked either on its corrections page or the page where it declares itself an IFCN signatory, to inform users that if they believe the signatory is violating the IFCN Code, they may inform the IFCN of this, with a link to the complaints page on the IFCN site.

The IFCN will on its site note that it does not and cannot act as any sort of appeals body for signatories and that complaints or corrections requests to the signatory are for signatories alone to handle.

26. Proving compliance with PRINCIPLE 5 – that the parent company has and adheres to a corrections policy, if the applicant is the fact-checking unit of a media company

If the applicant is the fact-checking unit of a media company, the applicant will be asked to provide evidence in its application that the parent media company has and adheres to an open and honest corrections policy.

CHECKLIST FOR APPLICANTS

Dear applicants, you should take a look at the checklist when you conduct your assessments. Please reach out to info@ifcn.org if you have any questions