

A quick guide to Public Safety Coverage standards

Earlier this year, the company rolled out new guidelines for public safety/crime coverage that newsrooms, and teams connected to newsrooms, are expected to follow.

These guidelines are meant to:

- Create, promote and strengthen trust with historically underserved communities and communities negatively impacted by our public safety coverage of the past
- Ensure we are balancing crime coverage with other human activity in our communities
- Ensuring we are spending reporter time and newsroom resources on actual matters of public safety
- Empowering our communities by delivering knowledge and context with coverage

Why: As Uncle Ben said in Spiderman, with great power comes great responsibility. Since their inception, newspapers have held great power in their communities, but until recently, we have not reckoned with the great responsibility we also have in shaping someone's life when we choose to write (or not write) a story about them.

In the days of print, if someone's name was in the paper, it would largely cycle out of public consumption once that editing was thrown out or left newsstands. Now, the internet is forever, and for the vast majority of people we write about in stories published online, that story will be at top of their Google results, meaning if they do something like apply for a job and are Googled, that is what will be seen, seriously impacting their quality of life for the rest of their life. However, the vast majority of crime written about does not warrant this black mark.

Furthermore, many times charges are reduced are dropped altogether but that is not reflected in our coverage.

What: The onus of following the guidelines is largely on the newsroom and there are very few hard and fast rules. Many of the guidelines are very broad and designed to inspire conversations within the newsroom and with editorial leadership.

There are several hard rules though:

- No mugshots unless it is a matter of urgent public safety, same with most courtroom photos of defendant
- No police or court logs
- No exploitative images
- Arrest stories should be limited to major crimes and matters of public safety
- If suspects/defendants are named in a story, the newsroom **MUST** follow up on the case in court through to its conclusion

As a planner it is your job to watch for these five hard and fast rules and flag planning desk leadership if you feel they are not being followed, or if you have questions about whether a story should be written. You may also ask newsroom leadership about mugshot use in stories.

All of this is to create a structure of accountability within the region to ensure these guidelines are followed and real change happens.

Here are the two decks used to train the newsrooms:

1. <https://gannett-my.sharepoint.com/:p/p/edion/EaptKBEWk9FhWsbN2noiNYBuQCQzAFpKYKPWAFLlwCgEw?e=zeAoc0>

2. https://gannett-my.sharepoint.com/:p/p/edion/EZM4u67a17dDsKHY4_hni5UBzUkXOI5CmE6FYqRKQ3343Q?e=ekd0go

