# GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSORS: The IFCN Code of Principles

## Table of contents


### BACKGROUND TO THE CODE

1. History of the Code of Principles p.3
2. The code's aims and changes agreed p.3
3. Making the verification system more rigorous p.4
   - Changes to the assessment process p.
   - Ensuring the findings are available to users
   - Responding to claims of violations of the code p.8

### VERIFYING ELIGIBILITY AND ADHERENCE TO THE FIVE KEY PRINCIPLES

1. Who is eligible to be a signatory p.9
2. The full text of the five key principles p.11
3. Meeting the criteria for verified status p.12
   - Principle 1 - non-partisanship and fairness
   - Principle 2 – standards and transparency of sources
   - Principle 3 – transparency of funding and organization
   - Principle 4 – standards and transparency of methodology
   - Principle 5 – an open and honest corrections policy

### ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

1. Transparency on the process p.19
2. Rigour and consistency between assessments p.19
3. Transparency for users p.19

### APPENDICES – GUIDELINES ON APPLYING THE CRITERIA

1. Proving eligibility to apply – legal status p.21
2. Proving eligibility to apply – purpose of fact-checking p.23
3. Proving eligibility to apply – state or political funding p.24
4. Proving compliance with Principle 1 p.25

5. Proving compliance with Principle 2 p.29
6. Proving compliance with Principle 3 p.30
7. Proving compliance with Principle 4 p.33
8. Proving compliance with Principle 5 p.35

# 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.

By 2020, more than 80 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 challenges

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. Making the verification system more rigorous

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 fact-checker 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 & COMPLIANCE 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 fact check 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. See notes on page 10.
[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] Please check the number of verified signatories from applicant's country from http://ifcncodeofprinciples.poynter.org or email factchecknet@poynter.org to make sure about the actual count.

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.
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 decide if applicants meet these conditions, assessors should:

2. Confirm whether or not the applicant publishes evidence that is verifiable and easy to access on its website that it is either a legally registered fact-checking organization or is a distinct unit set up for exclusively the purposes of fact-checking within another legally registered organization.[8] See the Appendices p.18 for how current signatories do this.

3. Review (i) the information provided in the application form about the organization's structure, motivation and purpose, (ii) the assessor's knowledge of its track record as an organization, as far as this is known, and (iii) the media, political, socio-economic and cultural context of the country, to write a short description for the board of the organization, its activities and its apparent motivations and the context in which it works, both answering the question of whether or not it is set up for the purpose of fact-checking and providing context for board members who do not know the country context. See the Appendices p.20 for guidance on how.

4. Review evidence provided [9] by the applicant of their work in the six months prior to the date of application to verify they have checked at least 26 claims in that time (or 52 in 12 months if from a country which already has at least five fact-checkers).[10] [11]

5. Review evidence provided by the applicant showing that at least 75% of the fact checks it published over the six months prior to the date of application focused on claims related to "*public interest*" issues, that is to say "*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.[12]) To verify the percentage provided by the

[8] 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.
[9] The applicant will be asked to provide a spreadsheet of links to prove the number of claims checked.
[10] The IFCN would expect the applicant to **continue to publish** fact checks at the average rate of 1 per week while the application is processed but the IFCN has the right to waive the requirement if good reason is provided
[11] The new regular publishing requirement will be in effect starting from June 1, 2020. Until then, the requirement is 13 fact checks in the last three months.
[12] 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.

applicant is accurate, assessors should crosscheck the topics of a sample of 20-30 checks chosen at random.

6. First (i) review a statement provided by the applicant in the application about its relationship to the state, politicians or political parties in the country or countries it covers, and, if it has any such relationship, how it ensures its editorial independence, second (ii) confirm that – if it receives funding from local or foreign state or political sources – the applicant also provides a statement on its site setting out how it ensures the editorial independence of its work, and, finally (iii) based on these statements and their own knowledge, provide an assessment to the board of whether she/he believes the applicant's editorial work is effectively independent from any state or political actors. See the Appendices p.21 for guidance on how.

# 7. The full text of the five key principles

Once that is clear – turn to compliance to 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 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 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.

# 8. Criteria for verifying compliance

Assessors have responsibility for assessing compliance to the five IFCN principles, set out below, according to an agreed set of 26 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.

## To decide if applicants meet these conditions, assessors should:

1. Select a randomised sample of at least 10 fact checks published by the applicant by picking 10 dates at random and identifying fact checks published on or closest to those dates, then (i) review them and the 10 fact checks provided by the applicant in its application and (ii) assess whether claims by one side are regularly treated to different standards than claims by the other side. See the Appendices p.22 for guidance on how to verify compliance.

2. Verify that the applicant makes a statement on its website about how it selects claims to check, then (i) review both the statement and the evidence provided in its application about the number and type of claims checked and how they were selected, and (ii) cross-check these against evidence from the 20 fact checks the assessor selected above and (iii) verify whether the applicant "does not unduly concentrate on any one side, [and] considers the reach and importance of claims it selects to check". See the Appendices p.23 for guidance on how to verify compliance.

3. Review the descriptions given of sources in the 20 fact checks provided/selected for testing to determine whether the applicant, as a rule, (i) discloses in its fact checks those interests of its sources where the reader might reasonably conclude those interests could influence the accuracy of the evidence provided (ii) discloses in its 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. See the Appendices p.24 for guidance on how to verify compliance.

4. Review the applicant's website and a randomised sampling of its social media feeds to check for evidence that the applicant is, as an organization, affiliated with or has shown support for any political party, politician, political candidate or advocacy group or has advocated for or against any policy position on any issue other than transparency and accuracy in public debate. **Note:** if the applicant is the fact-checking unit of a media organization, the media house's editorials and opinion pieces are not included. See the Appendices p.25 for guidance on how to verify compliance.

5. Verify that the applicant does set out its policy on non-partisanship for staff on its site. Review a randomised sampling of the public social media feeds of key staff figures to assess whether staff, as a rule, adhere to the policy or appear to be involved in advocacy or stating policy positions on 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. See Appendices p.25 for how to verify compliance.

*******

**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 decide if applicants meet these conditions, assessors should:

1. Review the sources used in the 20 fact checks selected earlier to see (i) whether 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, save where (ii) identifying the source would compromise the source's personal security, in which case they provide as much detail as compatible with the source's safety. See the Appendices p.26 for guidance on how to verify compliance.

2. From the review of the sources used in the 20 fact checks, assess whether the sources used are regularly the best quality primary sources available, and if secondary sources are used, that the reason for this is explained. See the Appendices p.26 for guidance on how to verify compliance.

3. From the review of sources, assess whether the applicant checks key claims against more than one source, save where the one source is the only source relevant on the topic. See the Appendices p.27 for guidance on how to verify compliance.

4. From the review of sources, assess whether the applicant identifies the relevant interests of the sources they use where a typical member of the public might reasonably conclude those interests could influence the accuracy of the evidence provided. See the Appendices p.30 for guidance on how to verify compliance.

5. From the review of sources, assess whether the applicant regularly (i) relies on anonymous, single, and/or secondary sources in circumstances where there is no justification for doing so (ii) presents a secondary source as a primary source, (iii) fails to identify their source's interests if they would be required to understand the source's credibility.

*******

**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.

**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 sets out the legal form in which the organization is registered (e.g. as a non-profit, as a company etc).
2. Applicants that are the fact-checking section or unit of a media house or other parent organization make a statement on ownership.

[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*".**

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. [14]
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 nevertheless be a red flag if the organization were to publish a false address.

## To decide if applicants meet these conditions, assessors should:

1. Determine whether – based on the information provided by the applicant about its legal status – the applicant qualifies as an "independent organization" or as "the fact-checking section or unit of a media house or other parent organization".
2. If the applicant is an independent organization, verify that it has a page on its website detailing each source of funding accounting for 5% or more of total revenue for its previous financial year. Verify that this page also indicates the legal form in which the organization is registered (e.g. as a non-profit, as a company etc).
3. If the applicant is the fact-checking section or unit of a media house or other parent organization, verify that it has made a statement about its ownership.
4. Verify that the applicant's website sets out its organizational structure, making clear how and by whom editorial control is exercised.
5. Verify that a page on the applicant's website details the professional biographies of those who play a significant part in editorial output.
6. Verify that the applicant provides easy means on its website and/or via social media for users to communicate with the editorial team.
7. Verify, so far as it is possible to do based on the assessor's knowledge of the applicant, that it (i) is not concealing from its users or the IFCN the identity of people who exercise significant control over the organization (ii) does not use pseudonyms for its team members and (iii) has not published a false address for its offices.

*******

[14] 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.

**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 relevant evidence that appears to support the claim as well as relevant evidence that appears to undermine it.
4. The applicant assesses the merits of the evidence found using the same standards as 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.

## To decide if applicants meet these conditions, assessors should:

1. Review the applicant's website to verify it publishes a statement about the methodology it uses to select, research, write and publish its fact checks.
2. Review the statement the applicant published on how it selects claims to check, and how this takes into claims' reach and importance and check this against the 20 fact checks selected for testing, to assess whether the applicant does indeed, as a rule, selects claim 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. Review the 20 fact checks selected for testing to assess whether the applicant, in general, sets out relevant evidence that appears to support claims made, as well as that which appears to undermine it, before determining which is correct.
4. Revert to the evidence used when assessing compliance with the criteria for Principle 1 on use of the same standards to check evidence regardless of who made the claims. The guidance on that issue is set out on page 22.
5. Review the 20 fact checks selected to test for evidence that the applicant seeks where possible to contact those who made the claim to seek supporting evidence, noting the reasons this may not be or advisable possible for reasons set out in the caveats.
6. Review the evidence provided by the applicant that it does 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.
7. Review the 20 fact checks and confirm whether or not 10% of more the fact checks reviewed show any of the problems identified below.
    a. make assumptions, without evidence, about the intentions of the person who made the claim.
    b. take statements made by any source at their word, without checking.
    c. accept the findings of any data sources, official or otherwise, or studies without first checking their methodology.
    d. include a significant amount of loaded or partisan language.

*******

**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.
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 decide if applicants meet these conditions, assessors should:

1. Review the applicant's website and confirm that it has a corrections or complaints policy that is easily visible and accessible on the site. If the applicant is a broadcaster review output for evidence the correction policy is frequently referenced in broadcasts.
2. Confirm 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.
3. Review a short statement to be provided by the applicant about how the policy was adhered to over the previous year and compare this statement against 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 signatory must state this in its application, which will be publicly available.
4. Review the website of existing signatories to confirm that either on its corrections page or the page where it declares itself an IFCN signatory, the signatory informs 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, review evidence provided that the parent media company has and adheres to an open and honest corrections policy.

# 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

- 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
- Before approving an assessor to assess a particular fact-checker, 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 “non-compliant” with the five key principles. The previous “partially compliant” rating is withdrawn.
- 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.
- 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 APPLYING THE CRITERIA

## 1. VERIFYING "ELIGIBILITY TO APPLY" – proof of legal status

To meet this requirement, applicants are required to publish on its website information that is easy for users to find setting out details of its 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 quick 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 standalone 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/



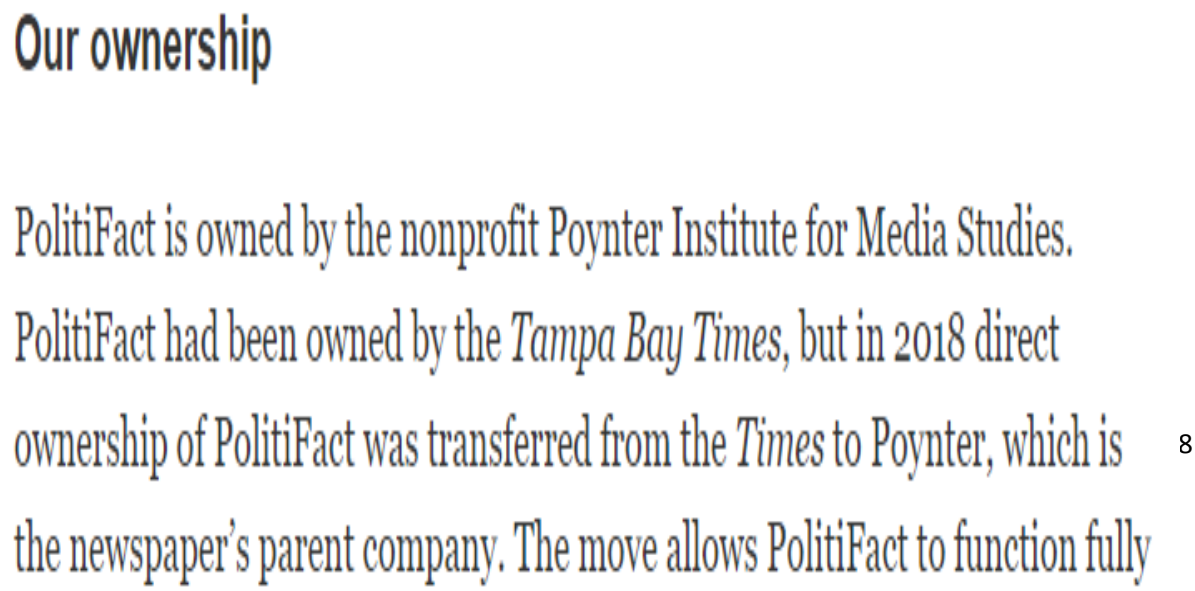
## Diversity & transparency of funding

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

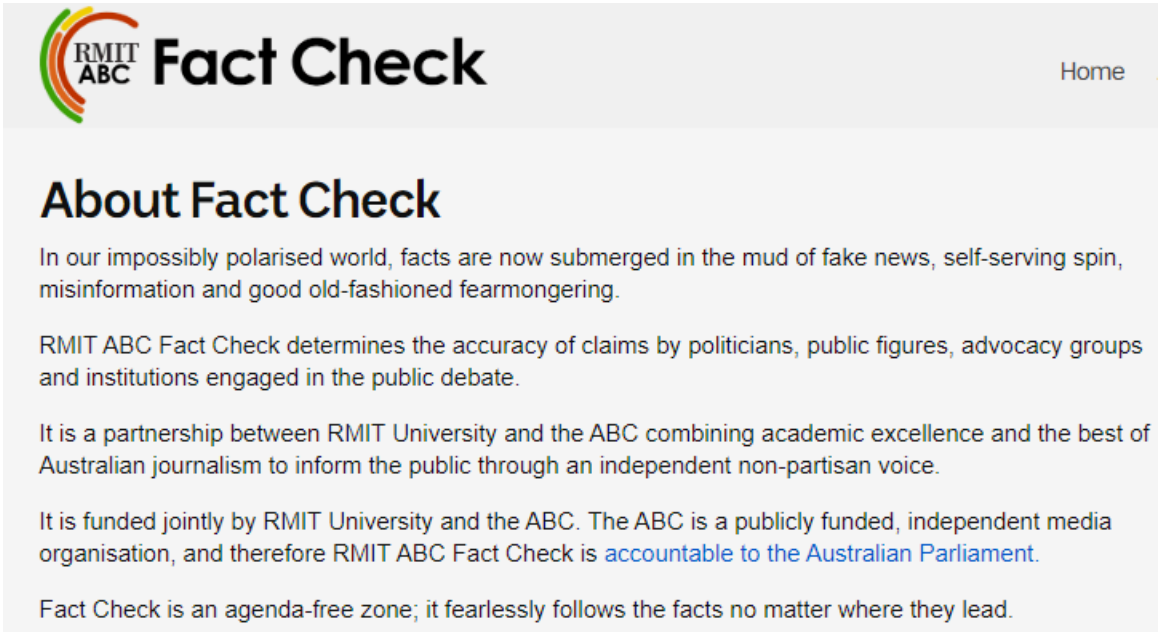


## Our ownership

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 Fact Check**
  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. VERIFYING "ELIGIBILITY TO APPLY" – the applicant is "set up exclusively for the purpose of fact-checking"

To assess this requirement, the assessors need to review:

(i) the information provided in the application form about the organization's structure, motivation and purpose,
(ii) the assessor's knowledge of its track record as an organization, as far as this is known, and
(iii) the media, political, socio-economic and cultural context of the country

And then write a short (perhaps 200-300 word) description for the board of the organization, its activities and its apparent motivations plus the context in which it works. The goal of this new section of the assessment report is (i) to answer the question of whether or not the applicant appears to be set up "exclusively for the purpose of fact-checking" and (ii) to explain something for board members who do not know the country about the media/political context in which the applicant is operating.

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.

1. When and why was your fact-checking operation started? [15]
2. How many people work or volunteer in the organization and what are their roles?[16]
3. What different activities does your organization carry out?[17]
4. What are the goals of your fact-checking operation over the coming year?[18]

The assessors should review the answers provided against what they know of the organization, to say how accurate these claims appear to be, if indeed the assessor knows the organization.

Finally, the assessors need to provide the board with a description of the media/political context of the country or countries where it operates – to help them understand the judgement about the applicant's claims to non-partisanship.

For example: "X is a country with 25 registered political parties, but three parties hold 90% of parliamentary seats between them and dominate debate, with the main opposition party by far the most active on social media, putting out far more information, true or false, than the others combined. Among the most contentious public issues over the previous year have been X, Y & Z".

---

[15] To answer this question, you should explain what triggered, or led to, the creation of the organization, what motivates it, and describe its mission.
[16] 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.
[17] 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.
[18] 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.

**Note**: When the new code has been launched in March 2020, two or three examples of how this section has been filled in by other assessors will be added here.

## 3. VERIFYING "ELIGIBILITY TO APPLY" – its editorial work is not "controlled by the state, a political party or politician" – and if it receives funding from a state or political actor – shows clear separation of editorial control from state or political influence

There is no single, straightforward way to prove that one editorial organization is "controlled" by the state or a political party and another receives funding but operates with genuine editorial independence.

Organizations such as ABC in Australia, the BBC in the UK and AFP in France all, to one extent or another, receive funding from the state which also has some influence over their senior management. And yet they remain news sources trusted by a majority of viewers.[19] By contrast, other media whose editorial charter or governance structure – like those of ABC, the BBC and AFP – also declare their editorial independence, are seen by many or even most of the public as politically biased towards those who fund them.

One of the questions to consider is the likelihood of any funding from a state or political linked source to seek to influence the outcomes of reports. If, for example, the funding comes from the state, a politician, a political party in the same country, about whom the fact-checker writes reports, it might be reasonable to assume an interest. If the funding comes from a foreign embassy or politically linked organization from abroad (such as the US-based National Endowment for Democracy or German centre-right party's pro-democracy foundation Konrad Adenauer Stiftung), and is to support training or general work it might be thought to be likely to have less likelihood of seeking editorial influence on report findings.

To assist the assessor's evaluation, applicants will be asked in their application to list and describe

(i) any official and/or funding relationship they have to the state, politicians or political parties in the country or countries they cover,

(ii) if their organization receives funding from local or foreign state or political sources, how they ensure the editorial independence of their work.

The answers provided would be expected to include, but need not be limited to, any charter or charters for editorial independence they 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

[19] https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/mar/10/bbc-news-most-trusted-source-for-more-than-half-of-people-in-the-uk

associations should declare this. Concealing such information should be seen as a red flag by the assessor.

To make their assessment about whether the assessor meets this criterion, the assessor should first review the applicant's statement and, at the same time, confirm that the applicant makes a statement on its website explaining how the organization ensures the editorial independence of its work. Second, it will be important for the assessors to exercise their judgement about whether the statements of editorial independence are accurate, based both on (i) knowing the organization involved, and the media and political context of the country, and (ii) taking into account the review of whether their work is in practice non -partisan under the terms of Principle 1.

******

## 4. VERIFYING 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 principle:

(i) **applicants** will be required to send in links to 10 fact checks along with an explanation of why they, both individually and as a group, provide evidence of their non-partisanship and high standards,

(ii) **assessors** will be asked to select a further 10 fact checks (more if they wish) at random, by identifying 10 dates at random over the previous six months, and identifying the 10 or more fact checks published on or closest to those dates,

Assessors should then review them all and assess whether claims by one side in any particular debate appear regularly to be treated to different standards than claims by the other side or sides.

Potential red flags to watch out for and investigate would include:

(i) A pattern is seen where 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 where 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 should:

(i) Consider obvious or subtle differences between the exact phrasing or meaning of similar but different claims that might explain differences in treatment,

(ii) Consider differences in the quality or relevance of evidence available to verify similar but different claims that might explain differences in treatment,

(iii) If you think you may have seen a pattern of an applicant treating claims by one "side" differently to how they treat claims from another "side", but are unsure, check with a wider sample of claims to see if the apparent pattern holds true,

(iv) If you believe you have seen a pattern of an applicant appearing to treat claims by one "side" differently to how they treat claims from another "side", discuss with the applicant, giving them an opportunity to explain the differences.

**Note:**

Examples setting out of how assessors make these judgements in practice will be added to the Appendices section of the guidelines, after these come into force from March 2020 onwards.

## 5. VERIFYING 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 verify compliance with this principle, assessors should, first, verify that the applicant does make a statement somewhere on its website setting out (i) the criteria by which it selects claims to be checked, (ii) how it ensures that it does not unduly concentrate its fact-checking on any one side, and (iii) how it considers the reach and importance of the claims it checks.

To ensure that assessors can verify that the applicant does, in practice, meet this criterion:

(i) Applicants will be required to provide in their applications a searchable spreadsheet of claims checked over the previous six months.

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

The assessors would then be asked to:

(i) Review (a) the statement provided in the website, (b) the evidence provided in the application about the number and type of claims checked and how they were selected, & (c) that the applicant considers the reach and importance of claims it checks

(ii) Cross-check this against evidence from the 20 fact checks the assessor is using as test evidence, to verify the applicant "does not unduly concentrate on any one side, but rather considers the reach and importance of claims it selects to check".

Issues to consider in making this judgement

The IFCN recognises that in countries around the world, rival politicians, political parties and institutions do not often make equal numbers 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,[20] the importance of the topic[21] and the authority or influence of those making it.[22]

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. VERIFYING 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

So that users can properly weigh evidence from sources quoted in fact checks, it is important that – where those sources have interests that might lead a reasonable member of the public to conclude their evidence could be influenced one particular way – those interests are disclosed in the fact checks. For example, if a source is a former government official or a known advocate for a related cause or issue, this should be described. Similarly, so users can properly weigh potential influences on the way a fact-checking organization works, it is important that it disclose commercial or other relationships with individuals or organizations which have interests in the matter being fact-checked where it believes might lead a reasonable member of the public who finds out about them to conclude they could have influence on the applicant's findings.

To assess compliance with this criteria:

The assessor should review the sources provided in the 20 fact checks it is reviewing to test compliance with different aspects of Principle 1, and assess whether, to their knowledge and

[20] i.e. the actual or potential audience via TV or radio, or online virality

[21] 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.

[22] 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.

judgement, the necessary background information on sources and relationships is – as a rule [23] – provided.

## 7. VERIFYING 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

Applicants may not as an organization publish on their site, in statements or via social media support for any political party, politician or political candidate or advocacy group, nor advocate for or against any policy positions save for transparency and accuracy. To assess compliance, the assessor should

(i) Review the applicant's website for evidence of any such expressions of support over the previous year
(ii) Conduct a randomised sampling of the organization's social media feeds to check for any such expressions of support over the previous year

Note: if the applicant is the fact-checking unit of a media organization, the media house's editorials and opinion pieces should not be included

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

To verify compliance with this the first part of this criteria, the assessor should review the applicant's website and confirm

(i) that the applicant sets out on its site its policy on how staff demonstrate non-partisanship,
(ii) that its policy would, if properly followed, ensure that "the applicant's staff do not get involved in advocacy, or state policy positions, on 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."

To assess compliance assessors should:

(i) Review a randomised sample of 100 posts from the publicly available social media accounts of key staff at the applicant who have direct involvement in or control over its editorial operations. [The assessors may as a rule ignore posts by other staff not involved in or with control over editorial matters]
(ii) Assess whether the posts indicate that, as a rule, staff involved in or with control over editorial output follow the declared policy, or whether a sufficient number

[23] The IFCN does not expect that applicants provide detailed information on every source quoted or relationship held. What assessors should look for is compliance with the principle in general, not compliance 100 percent. A few isolated failures might merit advice, but not count as non-compliance.

of the key staff' posts that are sampled state their personal support for politicians, political parties or candidates, or policy positions on issues the applicant fact checks, in such a way that might lead a reasonable member of the public to see the organization's work as biased. 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.

******

## 9. VERIFYING 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 verify that the applicant complies with this criteria on identifying the sources used, the assessor should:

(i) Review the sources used in the 20 fact checks selected earlier to see whether 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,

(ii) Does so save where identifying the source would compromise the source's personal security, in which case they provide as much detail as is compatible with the source's safety.

Examples of the sort of circumstances in which fact-checkers have appropriately protected the identity of a source, providing only as much detail as is compatible with the source's safety, will be set out here – as and when such cases are identified.

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

To verify that the applicant complies with this criteria on the use of primary sources, the assessor should:

(i) Review the sources used in the 20 fact checks to assess whether most sources used are indeed primary sources

(ii) Assess, so far as the assessors' knowledge of the subjects covered allows, whether the sources used appear to be among the best sources available on the topic, or of a consistently low quality

(iii) Verify whether, if secondary sources are used, an explanation for this is given.

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

To verify the applicant complies with this criterion on multiple sources, the assessor should:

- In the review of the 20 fact checks, assess whether two or more sources are checked as evidence for those key claims, save in cases where only one source is relevant[24]

## 12. VERIFYING PRINCIPLE 2 – the applicant identifies the relevant interests of sources they use

As set out above in **Point 6** in the Appendices, to assess compliance with this criteria, the assessor should:

(i) Review the sources provided in the 20 fact checks and assess whether, to their knowledge and judgement, the necessary background information on sources and relationships is provided in the fact checks.

(ii) For these purposes, necessary background information refers to any interests the source has that might lead a reasonable member of the public to conclude their evidence could be influenced. For example, if a source is a former government official or a known advocate for a related cause or issue, this should be described.

******

## 13. VERIFYING PRINCIPLE 3 – the type of organization

Applicants will be required 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. VERIFYING PRINCIPLE 3 – financial transparency for "independent organizations"

If the applicant is an "independent organization" the assessor should

(i) verify that it has a page on its website detailing each source of funding accounting for 5% or more of total revenue for its previous financial year.

(ii) verify that this page also sets out the legal form in which the organization is registered (e.g. as a non-profit, as a company etc).

Please note these caveats

[24] E.g. 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.

(i) If either the applicant is newly formed and has not completed accounts for a full financial year at the time of its application, or if the applicant's financial year end has passed but its accounts are not yet completed, it should provide draft figures for income to date and the identities of funders accounting for more than 5%, and commit to making its final financial figures public on its website within three months of the end of its 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. VERIFYING PRINCIPLE 3 – transparency about ownership for fact-checking sections or units of other organizations

If the applicant is confirmed as the fact-checking section or unit of a media house or other parent organization, the assessor has simply to verify that it has made a statement on its website about its ownership.

## 16. VERIFYING PRINCIPLE 3 – transparency about the organization structure and by whom editorial control is exercised

The assessor should also verify that the applicant's website sets out an explanation of its organizational structure, making clear how and by whom editorial control is exercised.

The goal of this criteria is to ensure that users understand – of those identified as working or otherwise involved with the organization – who exercises (or is in the position to exercise) editorial control over its fact-checking work and how this is done.

If the applicant chooses not to by-line its fact checks, for reasons set out in **point 17** the applicant should indicate how the senior editorial team takes responsibility for all fact checks. The explanation need not be highly detailed.

## 17. VERIFYING PRINCIPLE 3 – providing the professional profile of key players in the editorial output

The assessor should verify that the applicant provides a page listing the professional profiles of all those identified as having and exercising significant editorial control. This would include senior management, editors and regular contributors to the output.

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

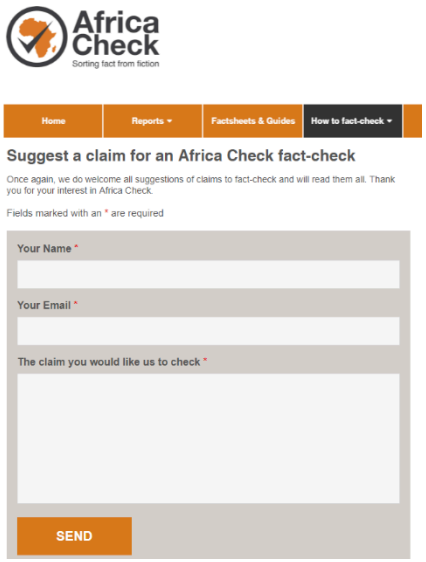
signatory believes either that the ethnic, religious, gender or other identity of the author of an article may cause the article to be unfairly pre-judged, or that putting the author's name on the fact checks could lead to online or physical abuse and threats, the name of the author can be kept off the reports. However, pseudonyms may not be used

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

One of the goals of the IFCN code is that users must be able to hold signatories to account. For this reason, it is important that the applicant provides easy means on its website and/or via social media for users to communicate with the editorial team. This could include messages on the home page, informing readers about how to "Get in touch" – as done here by UK fact-checkers **Full Fact**




Or appeals to users to send in claims to fact-check – via the website, or on WhatsApp or other media – from **Africa Check**

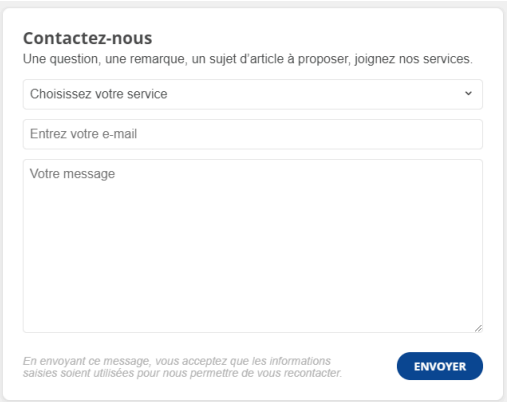






Or this from French fact-checkers **20Minutes**




## 19. VERIFYING PRINCIPLE 3 – that the applicant is neither concealing information nor providing false information

Given the influence that fact-checkers can have on public debate in their countries, the IFCN hopes that no applicant would seek to conceal information from it, nor provide false information to its users. But of course, that possibility, cannot be excluded.

The IFCN does not have the capacity to delve deeply into the background of every applicant, but *where assessors do know or suspect* that the applicant (i) is concealing from its users or the IFCN the identity of people who exercise significant control over the organization (ii) uses pseudonyms for its team members or (iii) has published a false address for its offices, it should

(i) Seek an explanation from the applicant
(ii) If confirmed, include this fact in its report to the IFCN.

**Note**

If the assessor concludes that the 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, it should inform the IFCN which may decide to bar the application.

******

## 20. VERIFYING PRINCIPLE 4 – the applicant selects claims to check primarily on the reach and importance of the claims

To verify compliance with this criterion, assessors should:

Revert to the evidence used when assessing compliance with the criteria for Principle 1 on the selection of claims. The guidance on assessing this issue is set out on page 24/25.

## 21. VERIFYING PRINCIPLE 4 – the applicant sets out evidence that supports and evidence that undermines a claim

To verify compliance with this criterion, assessors should

Review the 20 fact checks selected for testing and assess whether the applicant, in general, sets out relevant evidence that appears to support claims made, as well as that which appears to undermine it, before determining which is correct.

## 22. VERIFYING PRINCIPLE 4 – the applicant assesses the merits of evidence used by the same standards regardless of who made the claim

To verify compliance with this criterion, assessors should

Revert to the evidence used when assessing compliance with the criteria for Principle 1 on use of the same standards to check evidence regardless of who made the claims. The guidance on that issue is set out on page 23.

## 23. VERIFYING PRINCIPLE 4 – the applicant where possible contacts those who made the claim

As set out in this criteria, the IFCN understands that

1. it is often not possible with online claims to contact those who made the claim
2. 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 fact check,
3. 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.
4. There applicant may not wish to contact the person who made the claim for safety or other legitimate reasons.

These caveats noted, 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 fact-checker to understand the reasons a claim is made.

If a review of the 20 fact checks used for verification purposes indicates that this practice is almost never applied, the assessor should discuss with the applicant to determine the reason, and whether the practice is normally applied where it is possible.

## 24. VERIFYING PRINCIPLE 4 – the applicant's fact checks do not regularly display the four red flags

To verify that the applicant's fact checks do not regularly display the red flags set out below

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

The assessor should review the selection of 20 fact checks. If more than 10 percent of the fact checks reviewed this way show any of the problems identified, this should be reported in the assessment.

******

## 25. VERIFYING PRINCIPLE 5 – the applicant has an easily accessed and clear corrections or complaints policy

To verify compliance with this principle, the assessor should review its website and confirm:

(i) The applicant has a corrections or complaints policy that is easily visible and accessible on the organization's website or frequently referenced in broadcasts if it is a broadcaster.
(ii) 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) This policy is adhered to scrupulously.

To assess 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 assessor will review 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.

## 26. VERIFYING PRINCIPLE 5 – the applicant, if an existing signatory, enables users to inform the IFCN if they believe the signatory is violating the Code

Where 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 assessor should verify that this information, which will serve to help users ensure the integrity of the IFCN Code, is provided. The IFCN

will make that it does not and cannot act as any sort of appeals body for signatories and that complaints or corrections requests are for applicants alone to handle.

## 27. VERIFYING PRINCIPLE 5 – checking 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, it will be asked to provide evidence that the parent media company has and adheres to an open and honest corrections policy. The assessor will be asked to verify the evidence provided.

---

## CHECKLIST FOR ASSESSORS

**Dear assessors, you should take a look at the checklist when you conduct your assessments. Please reach out to factchecknet@poynter.org if you have any questions**