



PUBLIC NOTICE

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FCC UPDATES INFORMATION QUALITY GUIDELINES IN ACCORDANCE WITH DATA QUALITY ACT

By this Public Notice, the Office of Economics and Analytics and the Office of the Managing Director update the Commission's Information Quality Guidelines as required by the Data Quality Act, with guidance from the Office of Management and Budget. The Commission is committed to the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information it releases, and these guidelines will provide guidance to staff and information to the public about the Commission's policies and procedures.

The purpose of these guidelines is to describe in detail the Commission's policy and procedures for reviewing and substantiating the quality of information before it is disseminated to the public, and to describe the Commission's administrative mechanisms allowing affected persons to seek and obtain, where appropriate, correction of information disseminated that does not comply with the OMB Guidelines.

For further information, please visit <https://www.fcc.gov/general/information-quality-guidelines-fcc>. Please note that consumer complaints should be registered at: <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov/hc/en-us>.

INFORMATION QUALITY GUIDELINES

I. Purpose and Scope

1. The Federal Communications Commission (hereafter identified as the Commission) is publishing these guidelines to ensure and maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of specific types of information it disseminates, as required by section 515(a) of the Treasury and Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001, Pub. L. No. 106-554, § 515, 114 Stat. 2763, 2763A-153 (2000), *reprinted at* 44 U.S.C.A. § 3516 Historical and Statutory Notes (“Data Quality Act”). The Commission is committed to the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information throughout the information life cycle and will ensure that Paperwork Reduction Act clearance packages will result in information that will be collected, maintained, and used in a way consistent with the Commission’s and the Office of Management and Budget’s (OMB) information quality standards. These guidelines have also been updated to reflect OMB’s April 24, 2019 memo on Improving Implementation of the Information Quality Act.

2. The purpose of these guidelines is to describe the Commission’s policy and procedures for reviewing and substantiating the quality of information before it is disseminated to the public, and to describe the Commission’s administrative mechanisms allowing affected persons to seek and obtain, where appropriate, correction of information disseminated that does not comply with the OMB Guidelines, Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, Objectivity, Utility, and Integrity of Information Disseminated by Federal Agencies, 66 FR 49718 (Sept. 28, 2001) (interim guidelines), and 67 FR 8452 (Feb. 22, 2002), or the Commission’s Information Quality Guidelines.

3. These guidelines apply only to information disseminated by the Commission as defined in these guidelines. Other information distributed by the Commission that is not addressed by these guidelines may be subject to other Commission policies and correction procedures.

4. This document provides guidance to Commission staff and informs the public of the Commission’s policies and procedures. These guidelines are not rules or regulations. They are not legally enforceable and do not create any legal rights or impose any legally binding requirements or obligations on the Commission or the public. Nothing in these guidelines affects any otherwise available judicial review of Commission action. Factors such as imminent threats to public health or homeland security, or statutory or court-ordered deadlines may cause these guidelines to be temporarily waived.

II. Definitions

For purposes of these guidelines, the following definitions apply:

5. *Adjudicative processes* refer to the findings and determinations made in the course of formal and informal adjudications. Because there are well-established procedural safeguards and rights to address the quality of factual allegations and adjudicatory decisions, and to provide persons with an opportunity to contest decisions, these guidelines do not generally impose additional procedural requirements on the Commission during adjudicative proceedings. Examples of adjudicative processes include:

- i. Formal and informal complaint processes;
- ii. Notices, Opinions, or Orders that assign liability, assess damages, issue fines, revoke licenses, require forfeitures, seek consent, deny requests and pleadings, or any other action on the part of a non-Commission party;
- iii. Consent decrees;
- iv. Cease and desist orders;
- v. Pleadings, petitions, filings, requests, motions;
- vi. Items on the Accelerated Docket;
- vii. Cases before or decisions of administrative law judges;
- viii. Settlement negotiations;
- ix. Decisions and orders related to licensing;

- x. Applications for approval under section 271 of the Communications Act (as amended); and
- xi. Tariff investigations under sections 204 and 205 of the Communications Act (as amended).

6. *Affected persons* are people who may benefit from or be harmed by the dissemination or use of a specific information dissemination product.

7. *Complaint* refers to a written communication to the Commission that includes enough information so that the Commission can readily determine the specific information dissemination product the complaining party believes needs correcting, how the complaining party is affected by the information dissemination product sought to be corrected, the sections of these guidelines or the OMB Guidelines the complaining party believes have not been followed, what resolution the complaining party would like, and how to get in contact with the comment writer.

8. *Data* are the basic or underlying elements of information. All information dissemination products covered by these guidelines are based upon data. Additionally, covered information dissemination products may contain analysis of the data and conclusions drawn from this analysis.

9. *Dissemination* means Commission-initiated or sponsored distribution of information intended for the public. Dissemination does not include: distribution limited to government employees or agency contractors or grantees; intra- or inter-agency use or sharing of government information; responses to requests for agency records under the Freedom of Information Act, the Privacy Act, the Federal Advisory Committee Act, or other similar laws; correspondence with individuals or persons; archival records; press releases, in which the factual information has been previously released, and other non-scientific/non-statistical general, procedural, or organizational information; and public filings, subpoenas, or adjudicative processes.

10. *Influential*, when used in the phrase “influential scientific, financial, or statistical information,” means that the Commission can reasonably determine that dissemination of the information will have or does have a clear and substantial impact on important public policies or important private sector decisions.

11. *Information* means any communication or representation of knowledge such as facts or data, in any medium or form, including textual, numerical, graphic, cartographic, narrative, or audiovisual forms. This definition includes information disseminated from an Internet page, but does not include the provision of hyperlinks to information that others disseminate. This definition does not include opinions where the presentation makes it clear that what is being offered is someone's opinion rather than an official view.

12. *Information dissemination product* means any book, paper, map, machine-readable material, audiovisual production, or other documentary material regardless of physical form or characteristic that is covered by these guidelines and disseminated to the public as an expression of an official Commission position. This definition can include electronic documents, CD-ROMs, or web pages.

13. *Integrity* refers to the security of information – protection of the information from unauthorized access or revision to ensure that the information is not compromised through corruption or falsification.

14. *Non-scientific/non-statistical general, procedural, or organizational information* includes:

- i. Press releases, in which the factual information has been previously released
- ii. Information flyers and brochures
- iii. Speeches/Remarks/Presentations and their accompanying visual materials
- iv. Listings of:
 - a. Licensees, registrations, fees paid

- b. Phone directories
 - c. Job openings
- xvi. Transcriptions or minutes (video, audio, or print) of meetings
- xvii. Glossaries
- xviii. Links to non-Commission sites
- xix. Standards
- xx. FAQ's
- xxi. Organizational descriptions
- xi. Organization charts
- xii. Budget submittals
- xiii. Strategic and performance plans
- xiv. Descriptions of laws, regulations, rules that underpin Commission activities
- xv. Biographies
- xxii. Applications, standards, and help products
- xxiii. Forms (for printing or on-line filing)
- xxiv. Database search results
- xxv. How-to-file materials
- xxvi. Fee information
- xxvii. Electronic comment filings

15. *Objectivity* involves two distinct elements, presentation and substance. In a substantive sense objectivity means that, where appropriate, data should have full, unbiased, reliable, accurate, transparent documentation; and error sources affecting data quality should be identified and disclosed to users. In a scientific, financial, or statistical context, substantive objectivity means that the original and supporting data shall be generated, and the analytic results shall be developed, using sound statistical and research methods. Presentational objectivity involves a focus on ensuring unbiased clarity, accuracy, completeness, and reliability.

16. *Quality* is a term encompassing utility, objectivity, and integrity. Therefore, the guidelines sometimes refer to these four statutory terms, collectively, as “quality.”

17. *Reproducibility* means that the information is capable of being substantially reproduced, subject to an acceptable degree of imprecision. For information judged to have more influence or important impact, the degree of imprecision that is tolerated is reduced. With respect to analytic results, “capable of being substantially reproduced” means that independent analysis of the original or supporting data using identical methods would generate similar analytic results, subject to an acceptable degree of imprecision or error.

18. *Transparency* refers to practices of describing the data and methods used in developing an information dissemination product in a way that it would be possible for an independent reanalysis to occur by a qualified individual or organization. Transparency does not require that information be disclosed where disclosure would result in harm to other compelling interests such as privacy, trade secrets, intellectual property, confidentiality protections, or public safety.

19. *Utility* refers to the usefulness of the information to its intended users, including the public. In assessing the usefulness of information that the Commission disseminates to the public, the Commission will consider the uses of the information not only from the perspective of the Commission but also from the perspective of the public.

III. Pre-Dissemination Information Review and Substantiation Process

20. The following process applies to information dissemination products distributed by the Commission, regardless of when the information was first disseminated, in order to ensure and maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information. These guidelines similarly apply to information originally collected or developed by another Federal agency that is disseminated by the Commission. The information dissemination products covered by these guidelines include reports

prepared for Congress or required by legislation, such as the annual reports of services, prices, and competition in various communication industries.

21. Information exempt from these guidelines includes information limited to: public filings, subpoenas, or adjudicative processes; non-scientific/non-statistical general, procedural, or organizational information; information that is not initiated or sponsored by the Commission; information that expresses personal opinions rather than formal agency views; information for the primary use of federal employees (inter- or intra-agency), contractors, or grantees; responses to requests made under the Freedom of Information Act, the Privacy Act, the Federal Advisory Committee Act, or similar laws; agency correspondence; archival records; trade secrets, intellectual property, confidential data or information; and non-routine or emergency public safety information.

22. For each information dissemination product covered by these guidelines every Bureau or Office shall conduct a pre-dissemination review using the standards below:

a. Quality will be demonstrated through the incorporation of a methodological section or appendix that describes, at a minimum, the design and methods used during the creation, collection, and processing of the data; the compilation and/or analysis of the data; and the pre-release review of the information dissemination product for clarity, completeness, accuracy, and reliability. For covered information dissemination products that contain analytic results, the FCC is committed to applying rigorous robustness checks and will document what checks were undertaken as part of the required methodological section or appendix.

b. Objectivity will be demonstrated by including in the information dissemination product's methodology section or appendix a discussion of other scientifically, financially, or statistically responsible and reliable alternative views and perspectives, if these alternative views or perspectives are not already noted in other sections of the information dissemination product.

c. Utility will be demonstrated by the responsible Bureau/Office incorporating into the methodology section or appendix examples of the use of the information dissemination product. These examples could include, but are not limited to, listing of the legislation requiring the information dissemination product or the specific request for the information dissemination product. Where appropriate, the methodology section should also provide the public with sufficient documentation about the information dissemination product to allow data users to determine the fitness of the data for the purpose for which third parties may consider using it.

d. Integrity is demonstrated by the Commission's routine, day-to-day compliance across all operations and processes with relevant data protection and security sections of applicable statutes and regulations and therefore does not have to be specifically addressed in information dissemination products covered by these guidelines.

23. In addition to the above, for influential information dissemination products covered by these guidelines, every Bureau and Office should consider if there are additional steps that would improve the quality, objectivity, utility, or integrity of the product. These additional steps could include requesting input from the Commission's Office of Economics and Analytics, seeking public comment on the methods used to gather and compile the underlying data, subjecting the product to statistical analysis, or taking measures to confirm the reproducibility of the information.

24. Consistent with other legal and policy considerations, Bureaus and Offices are encouraged to communicate influential information in a transparent manner by including, where appropriate, a clear explanation of underlying assumptions, accurate contextualization of uncertainties, and a description of the probabilities associated with both optimistic and pessimistic projections. For information dissemination products that incorporate third-party or non-government data, consistent with other legal, policy, and privacy considerations, Bureaus and Offices should endeavor to provide sufficient information on the characteristics of the data and analysis employed to allow the public to reproduce the Commission's conclusions. Where an information dissemination product is based on data analysis using

a specialized set of computer code, the Bureau or Office should consider whether it is feasible and beneficial to make the underlying code available for public analysis.

25. In determining whether a particular information dissemination product is influential, relevant factors include: the likelihood that the product will be used, either by the Commission or outside commenters, in future proceedings; the extent to which the information dissemination product might result in new arguments not previously presented; and whether the information dissemination product is novel or is merely a continuation of a prior series of information dissemination products.

26. For influential scientific information disseminated by the Commission, Bureaus and Offices should consult OMB's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, 70 Fed. Reg. 2664 (Jan. 14, 2005). This applies not only to information dissemination products compiled by the Commission, but also to third-party data or models, to the extent that the Commission presents the third-party information as representing the view of the Commission or intends to rely on such third-party information as central to its decision making, rather than merely ancillary support or verification. In addition to the requirements set out in the Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, Bureaus and Offices should, where appropriate, charge peer reviewers with evaluating the underlying data and the sensitivity of the Commission's conclusions in a given information dissemination product. If influential information that has been peer reviewed changes significantly as a result of that review, Bureaus and Offices should consider whether the information dissemination product would benefit from a subsequent round of peer review.

IV. The Complaint and Appeals Process

27. Filing a Complaint: Except as provided in subsection (b) below, affected persons may seek timely correction of information dissemination products maintained and distributed by the Commission that do not comply with the Commission's or OMB's guidelines by providing the information identified at <https://www.fcc.gov/information-required-when-filing-information-quality-comment>. This information can be submitted electronically by clicking on the link found at the end of the page.

28. The procedures for filing and resolving complaints set forth in these guidelines, including the timetables set forth herein, do not apply to information disseminated in rulemaking proceedings. Affected persons seeking correction of information disseminated in the context of a rulemaking proceeding should raise concerns about the quality, objectivity, utility and integrity of the information in accordance with the procedures for public comment in the rulemaking process rather than the complaint process set forth in these guidelines. Because there are well-established procedural safeguards and rights to address the quality of factual allegations as part of the rulemaking process, and to provide persons with an opportunity to contest decisions, these guidelines do not impose any additional requirements on the Commission during rulemaking proceedings and do not provide parties to such rulemaking proceedings any additional rights of challenge or appeal. Commenters' concerns will be addressed, as appropriate, in the context of decisions in those proceedings.

29. Complaint Resolution: A determination will be made within 45 days of receipt of the complaint on whether correction is warranted. For good cause, this period may be extended. However, a Bureau or Office will not extend the response deadline beyond 120 days of the receipt of the complaint absent the concurrence of the party that requested the correction.

30. The decision on appropriate corrective action will be based upon the nature and timeliness of the information dissemination product involved and such factors as the significance of the correction on the use of the information dissemination product and the magnitude of the correction. Inconsequential, trivial, or frivolous complaints may require no response at all. If corrective action is warranted, the correction will occur within 60 days of this notification to the complaining party.

31. If a correction is warranted, the appropriate Bureau or Office handling the complaint will respond to the complaint in a manner appropriate to the nature and extent of the complaint. Examples of appropriate responses include personal contacts via letter or telephone, form letters, errata notices, press

releases, or mass mailings that correct a widely disseminated error or address a frequently raised complaint.

32. **Right to Appeal:** If the person who requested correction does not agree with the initial decision (including corrective action, if any), the person may file an application for review by the Commission within 30 days of the date of the notification of action on the complaint or the corrective action. Applications for review must be submitted electronically by sending an email to InformationQualityAppeal@fcc.gov.

33. The written appeal must include a copy of the original complaint and the response thereto, and an explanation of how the initial resolution of the complaint or the corrective action was contrary to the Commission's or OMB's information quality guidelines.

34. Applications for review will be resolved within 120 days. The Commission, in appropriate cases, may deny an application for review without providing reasons.

V. Reporting Requirements

35. On an annual fiscal-year basis, the Commission shall submit a report to the Director of OMB providing information (both quantitative and qualitative, where appropriate) on the number and nature of complaints received regarding compliance with OMB guidelines, and how such complaints were resolved. The report shall be submitted no later than January 1 of each following year.

VI. Effective Dates

36. Pre-dissemination review under section III, above, shall apply to information dissemination products that the Commission disseminates on or after October 1, 2002, regardless of when the information was first disseminated.

37. The administrative mechanisms noted in section IV shall apply only to information dissemination products that the Commission disseminates on or after October 1, 2002.