



HHS Wikipedia Guidance

This information applies to the entirety of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Operational Divisions and Offices within the Department may create guidance and establish policies that are more restrictive than those in this document if the appropriate management so chooses.

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Background.....	1
HHS use of Wikipedia	1
Accountability.....	1
Editorial Guidelines.....	2
Starting Points for HHS Review	3

BACKGROUND

“Wikipedia is a free, multilingual, open content encyclopedia project operated by the United States-based non-profit Wikimedia Foundation.” ([Wikipedia: About](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About)¹) Wikipedia has a number of policies and guidelines that must be observed by HHS employees and contractors to ensure that information added to Wikipedia is appropriate and that HHS actions provide accountability and avoid the appearance of conflict of interest.

HHS use of Wikipedia

HHS staff and contractors are to follow Wikipedia’s policies, guidelines, and terms of use. In support of standing Wikipedia policy, HHS entities should “avoid, or exercise great caution” ([Wikipedia: How to avoid COI edits](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:How_to_avoid_COI_edits)²) in creating new Wikipedia entries or significant pieces of content on HHS programs, offices, staff, research, or other activities. Editing factual Wikipedia content on HHS activities can be appropriate and participating in article discussion pages is encouraged when performed in complete transparency and with conflicts of interest noted.

Accountability

HHS offices and agencies editing Wikipedia must document their actions properly. Editing of Wikipedia, a public Web site, may create a federal record of agency action or be subject to a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request.

1. The office or agency or its contractor should first identify Wikipedia articles that need correction or updating, incomplete article ‘[stubs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Stub)’³ that could be expanded, or gaps for

¹ URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About>

² URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Conflict_of_interest#How_to_avoid_COI_edits

³ URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Stub>





which a new article could be created, and then outline planned edits and/or topics to be addressed as well as identify the staff resources to be assigned. *Only factual information should be addressed; avoid articles about political issues or negative content about the department and its programs, as well as biographies of senior officials.*

2. Agencies should adhere to their communications clearance process for all edits to Wikipedia. A written plan and justification should be submitted through the normal clearance channels for approval before official accounts are created and official edits made.
3. If the scope of this plan changes, it should be resubmitted for review.
4. Upon approval of the plan, create a Wikipedia user account for each staff member or contractor as indicated in your plan; Wikipedia doesn't permit shared or organization accounts. Only those individuals who are cleared to speak on behalf of the agency may create and use accounts.
 - Use official email addresses only—no personal accounts.
 - Follow the [Username policy](#)⁴.
 - Document the email accounts being used.
5. The [Talk page](#)⁵ for each user account must clearly identify the user as an employee or contractor acting on behalf of HHS. See '[Editors who may have a conflict of interest](#)⁶.'
6. The office or agency must maintain complete documentation of user accounts, email addresses used, and all edits and communications with Wikipedia and its contributors, and may not rely on the Wikipedia record. Also, contractors may not hold the record copies of these items—they must be submitted to the responsible HHS office.

Editorial Guidelines

Note: Wikipedia's [policies and guidelines](#)⁷ are extensive. This list is a starting point and addresses key HHS concerns for accountability and avoidance of conflict of interest.

1. Before proposing or making edits on Wikipedia, see [Suggestions for Conflict of Interest Compliance](#), and understand [What Wikipedia is not](#)⁸.
2. Use only properly established user accounts as described under **Accountability** above. No anonymous edits are permitted—sign all posts so it is clear that an HHS-affiliated person proposed or made the edit or addition. Appropriations laws forbid any public relations activity that is “covert propaganda,” that is, the communication does not reveal that government appropriations were expended to produce it.
3. Edit or add only factual information on Wikipedia. Avoid articles pertaining to partisan political activity (i.e., where the content furthers the success or failure of a partisan political candidate, group, or party) or negative content about the Department and its programs, as well as biographies of senior officials. This sort of activity may violate the [Hatch Act](#) or appropriations law “publicity and propaganda” clauses that restrict the use of funds for “puffery” or “self-aggrandizement” of the agency or its officials.
4. Follow the [Key policies and guidelines](#)⁹.
5. Understand '[neutral point of view](#)¹⁰', '[conflict of interest](#)¹¹', '[notability](#)¹²', and '[advertising \(or self-promotion\)](#)¹³'.

⁴ URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:User_names

⁵ URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Talk_page_guidelines

⁶ URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Conflict_of_interest#Editors_who_may_have_a_conflict_of_interest

⁷ URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Policies_and_guidelines

⁸ URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:NOT>

⁹ URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Key_policies_and_guidelines





6. Read the Talk page for background on any article that you think needs editing before taking any action.
7. Small factual edits made to an article, such as the names of agencies, programs, and senior officials, budget dollars, or authorizing legislation, also must be noted on the Talk page of the article edited for transparency.
8. More substantive edits or additions first must be proposed on the Talk page of the article or stub to allow other Wikipedia editors the opportunity to review the proposed changes. In general, wait at least 10 business days for comments and suggestions before proceeding with the edit or addition. If there is a consensus among ‘[Wikipedians](#)’¹⁴ that the edits or additions do not comply with Wikipedia’s guidelines, do not make them.
9. If a [new article](#)¹⁵ is proposed, first create it on your user page and invite comments from the [category](#)¹⁶ on Wikipedia where you think it belongs before posting the article to the live site. There is a [template for new articles](#)¹⁷. If there is a consensus that the new article does not meet Wikipedia’s guidelines, do not post it live.
10. Do not copy content from your Web site onto Wikipedia without first editing it for use in the context of the encyclopedia—e.g., correcting for neutral point of view, factual basis, style, and other aspects of the original content that may not be appropriate for Wikipedia.
11. Provide citations to [reliable sources](#)¹⁸ as appropriate.
12. Remember that Wikipedia is an international project—except for articles about the U.S. government, confine information specific to the United States to a separate section of the article.
13. Wikipedia is not a repository of links: do not add links from articles to your Web site except as described in the [External links guideline](#)¹⁹.
14. Follow the [Wikipedia style guide](#)²⁰.

Starting Points for HHS Review

1. [United States Department of Health and Human Services](#)²¹ – main article.
2. [HHS Category](#)²².
3. [United States government stubs](#)²³ – articles identified as needed by Wikipedia but not complete.
4. Search Wikipedia for articles by topic—for example, ‘[HIPAA](#)’²⁴.

¹⁰ URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view

¹¹ URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Conflict_of_interest

¹² URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:N>

¹³ URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:External_links#Advertising_and_conflicts_of_interest

¹⁴ URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedians>

¹⁵ URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Starting_an_article

¹⁶ URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Category>

¹⁷ URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:New_article_template

¹⁸ URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:RS>

¹⁹ URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:External_links

²⁰ URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Manual_of_Style

²¹ URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_Health_and_Human_Services

²² URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:United_States_Department_of_Health_and_Human_Services

²³ URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:United_States_government_stubs

²⁴ URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health_Insurance_Portability_and_Accountability_Act

