

## Religion Newswriters Association Membership Policy

*Approved by the board of directors on May 1, 2009.*

### **SECTION I. PRINCIPLES**

RNA is a media organization. RNA is not a public relations or a religion advocacy organization. The RNA board, through its membership committee, determines eligibility for one of two categories of membership—Active and Associate—by implementing these policies in accordance with the Bylaws. When reviewing an application for membership, the committee:

- A. Does not render opinion on the journalistic quality of the applicant's work. RNA is a membership organization and not a credentialing agency;
- B. Does consider the applicant's job duties and the applicant's employer. RNA's active members do not lobby or perform public relations work relating to religion, religious issues, or on behalf of religious leaders. For an explanation of how RNA defines lobbying and public relations, please see Section VI;
- C. Seeks to keep RNA's membership as open as possible in order to promote more journalism by more people about religious issues.

### **SECTION II. ACTIVE MEMBERS**

To qualify for active membership, an applicant must cover religion consistent with the principles outlined in Section I, primarily as:

- A. A journalist who covers religion for a publication or news outlet that is generally available to the public, or;
- B. A freelance journalist who covers religion, the majority of whose work appears in media outlets whose employees would normally qualify for active membership, or;
- C. A self-employed author, documentary filmmaker, blogger or other media content producer who covers religion consistent with the principles outlined in Section I, or;

Active membership is also open to:

- D. Students at universities or other accredited schools with an interest in religion reporting or in learning about media coverage of religion, or full-time educators on the faculty of such institutions.

Examples of qualifying media outlets include:

- TV or radio stations
- newspapers and magazines that are available on newsstands, through the Internet or another electronic device, or through general subscription or unrestricted membership (open to anyone)
- blogs written by self-employed journalists or authors
- Scholars who research religion news or students taking religion reporting courses

### **SECTION III. ASSOCIATE MEMBERS**

To be an Associate Member you are not eligible for active membership.

Examples of potential Associate Members include:

- Public relations professionals, including those who work for the press arms or official news services of religious institutions
- people for whom journalism is a secondary occupation
- journalists who work on behalf of a university
- officials at journalism organizations
- part-time faculty at universities
- general public

### **SECTION VI. PUBLIC RELATIONS & LOBBYING EXCLUSION**

You cannot be an Active Member of RNA if you engage in lobbying or public relations work relating to religion or religious issues or products.

A. Lobbying is considered to be professional work primarily designed to influence legislation or government regulations.

B. Public relations is considered to be professional work on behalf of an organization—including a university, government agency, religious leader, religious organization, non-profit organization or business—that promotes its views on issues affecting the organization. It often involves media relations, such as issuing press releases or other statements to journalists.

### **SECTION VII. PROCEDURES FOR DENIAL, TERMINATION, NON-RENEWAL OR RECLASSIFICATION OF MEMBERSHIP**

Members will be notified by first class or electronic mail if their membership is to be terminated for cause, and applicants will be similarly notified if their application for membership is denied. Such notification will also occur if a membership is to be not renewed based on ineligibility due to changes in jobs or job duties, or if a member is to be reclassified for the same reason.

**A. Termination for cause:** Membership may be terminated for cause if a member has failed to be honest and complete in filling out application forms and in answering annual surveys and other inquiries, misrepresented her or his job status, or otherwise violated important rules or policies of the organization, including but not limited to intentional misuse of on-line services such as the listserv.

Opportunity for a Hearing: If within 60 days of notice by RNA, a member facing termination for cause requests a hearing, as stipulated in the Bylaws, the hearing shall be conducted before the Board of Directors at the subsequent board meeting, if possible, but no later than the second board meeting following the date of the original termination notice. The member has a right to bring an attorney or other representative to the hearing. The member bears the obligation for his/her own travel and other expenses related to the hearing, including the cost of legal counsel. Whether or not a hearing is conducted, the final decision shall be made by the board members present at a legally constituted meeting, with a two-thirds majority vote necessary to terminate a membership for cause.

**B. Non-renewal/reclassification of membership:** Members who become ineligible for RNA membership or who are subject to a change in membership status based on a change in jobs or job duties, shall have the opportunity, within 30 days of notice by RNA, to present countervailing written evidence prior to any final decision by the board or its designee (typically the RNA membership committee). Non-renewal or reclassification of membership is an administrative action, enforcing the eligibility provisions of the Bylaws and related membership policies. It is not to be confused with termination for cause or for non-payment of dues. In cases of membership non-renewal/reclassification, the board is not obligated to conduct a formal hearing, beyond extending the opportunity to submit written evidence. However, any member is welcome to attend any RNA board meeting (at their own expense) and will be accorded reasonable opportunity to be heard on membership issues or other matters.

**C. Non-payment of dues:** Members whose annual dues remain unpaid for longer than one (1) month are no longer considered members in good standing. Dues-delinquent members may continue to receive certain mailings and be carried on the books as members, but may be precluded from full participation in certain RNA activities and privileges, including but not limited to voting in elections, receipt of the newsletter, and use of on-line services. After dues are delinquent for one year, RNA staff shall drop the member from the membership rolls.

**D. Non-member applicants:** New applicants to RNA may appeal membership committee decisions to the RNA Board of Directors, in writing, within 60 days of notice of the membership decision. The RNA board will consider that submission at the subsequent board meeting, if possible, but no later than the second board meeting following the date of the original membership decision. As with non-renewal/reclassification of membership (see Section VII. B.), reviewing a new applicant is an administrative action and the board is not obligated to conduct a formal hearing when considering appeals from new applicants.