

## The Vermont Guardian – Contributor Guidelines

Please read the following before submitting your stories, photos, or ideas.

**The Vermont Guardian publishes a print edition weekly, as well as Internet news and features as stories develop. We're always looking for solid, independent reporting and fresh ideas that connect with our audience.**

Before we launched this business, we asked hundreds of Vermonters how they felt about their current media options and what they wanted from a new outlet. They were obviously dissatisfied, and complained about too much pre-packaged news, the limited scope of local and regional coverage, an overall lack of care and accuracy, and opinion pages that left too many viewpoints out. They asked for something new: a source of news, investigations, and commentary that is timely, thoughtful, thorough, and doesn't ignore most of the state's 251 towns. They talked about a newspaper that would celebrate the unique quality of life enjoyed by Vermont residents, as well as a comprehensive, full-featured website. They wanted an independent source of reporting they could really trust. That's what we strive to provide.

The Guardian editorial departments seeking freelance contributions currently include Vermont (state and local), National, Global, Commentary, Workplace, Ecology, Culture, and Sports. **Story lengths:** News (350-750 words); features (1000-2000); commentary (500-750). Tips welcome. To become a Guardian correspondent, contact Shay Totten (State/Northern VT), Kate Casa (National/Southern VT), Greg Guma (National/International). See Interim e-mail addresses listed below.

Here's what we're looking for:

**GLOBAL:** Well-sourced international news reports overlooked or poorly handled by other media. Analysis of news coverage (see Commentary). Breaking news, authoritative analysis, and ongoing coverage of evolving stories. Special focuses: Eastern Canada, human rights, climate change, war and peace. Availability of powerful photo images is a plus.

**NATIONAL:** Significant developments short-changed by today's pack journalists; topics such as jobs, health, drugs, civil liberties, environment. Spot news and investigative features. Special focus: Vermont congressional delegation. Photos that reveal the truth behind the headlines.

**STATE:** News reports from every city, town, village and gore in Vermont. Local features with statewide implications. Informed analysis of controversies and promising projects. Special focuses: Grassroots problem-solving, election developments, prisons and reparative justice, property taxes, regional planning, efforts by young Vermonters to make the world more just. Contributions by young writers encouraged. Photos that reveal something special or unique about where you live.

**COMMENTARY:** Global, state and local topics. Installments and items for Media Watch (critique of coverage by other media outlets, including those in Vermont). Special focuses: Secession, smoking, etc. Is there a "Vermont Way"?

**ECOLOGY:** Efforts by conservation groups and individuals to protect and preserve the natural world. New developments in Vermont, the nation, and around the world. Interviews with leading officials, activists, and authors. Special focuses: Human culture's impact on nature; sustainable agriculture; wind, water, and nuclear power.

**WORKPLACE:** Small business trends, labor and workplace-related news and information. Investigative reports, analysis of legislation, and efforts that impact the lives of workers. Special Focuses: creative workplace solutions, ski industry conditons

**CULTURE:** News and views on topics including architecture, social trends, spirituality, gardening, education, health; previews, interviews, and reviews of new shows, museums, and special events.

**SPORTS:** Commentary and analysis that goes beyond the conventional play-by-play. Special focuses: skiing, kayaking and water sports, NASCAR, cycling, equestrian.

## SUBMISSIONS

**QUERIES:** The preferred approach for first-time writers is a brief query by mail or e-mail. Address: Vermont Guardian, POB 335, Winooski, VT 05404. E-mail addresses: [shay@vermontguardian.com](mailto:shay@vermontguardian.com) (Shay Totten), [greg@vermontguardian.com](mailto:greg@vermontguardian.com) (Greg Guma), or [kate@vermontguardian.com](mailto:kate@vermontguardian.com) (Kate Casa), outlining what you want to submit. Tell us who you are and what makes your idea unique or timely. What's the angle, and why will people want to read it? Feel free to pitch more than one story idea. We'll let you know whether we're interested and when to submit. Sometimes an article is right for us, but its release date may need to be timed for maximum impact. Once we've worked with you, the process will be less formal.

**STYLE:** The Guardian is for a general audience, not just sub-cultures or elites. That doesn't mean you should "talk down" to people, but keep your writing clear and direct. We want strong, exciting, provocative leads, and tight copy with adequate attribution. Avoid long, complex sentences and abstract prose. You may have a point of view, but you need to provide the reader with attributed information. We're interested in what you think, but the main focus should be on what you actually know. Even a passionate commentary writer should be able to defend a position with verifiable facts.

**DEADLINES:** Even a great story won't make if you blow the deadline. We must have your copy on the date we discuss. Whenever possible, you'll see an edited draft; please reply with corrections or late revisions within 24 hours. For breaking news stories, you'll have the chance to submit revisions right up to the print deadline and separately for the Internet version.

**POTENTIAL CONFLICTS:** If you have any relationship to the story you are proposing or any source (on or off the record), outline it in your query. If the source is confidential, we don't need the name, but we must understand the basic nature of the relationship.

**FORM:** Please email your material in a simple word processing format. Attachments are OK, as long as the program is easily readable and the file isn't unnecessarily large. If foreign words are used, include a translation in parenthesis. Leave line spaces between paragraphs. Include a short bio at the end, as well as a current address and phone number.

**LENGTH AND PAYMENT:** The Guardian pays upon publication. News articles for various sections (350-750 words): \$50-\$100; Features (1000-2000 words): up to \$200; Commentary (500-750): individually negotiated. Payment will be based on what we run, not the length of the article you submit. Make every word count. If a story requires extensive editing, we reserve the right to reduce payment by up to 25 %. For assigned stories, investigations, and those requiring special expenses, higher payment can be negotiated. However, all special arrangements or expenses must be discussed in advance.

**PHOTOS:** We pay from \$35-75 each for photos used inside the paper or on the Website, and \$100 and up for a print cover image. Electronic submission preferred. NB: For preview purposes, low resolution images are fine; however, the photo must be available in high resolution format for print reproduction (minimum 1200 pixels).

**RIGHTS AND REPRINT POLICY:** Unless otherwise negotiated, we purchase first periodical rights, including print and Internet distribution, and reserve the right to hold material for up to one month. You retain all other rights, but must warrant the authorship, originality, and ownership of the article, that it has not been published before, and that its publication will not infringe on any copyright and does not defame or invade the privacy of any person. If Vermont Guardian acts as agent for the republication or syndication of an article, you retain right of approval and will receive 75% of any payments received. If you object to any aspect of this policy, let us know before submitting your article. Other terms may be negotiated.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:** The Vermont Guardian invites dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct. We encourage our audience to voice grievances. In exposing the unethical practices of journalists and other news media, we embrace a commitment to abide by the same standards to which we hold others.

We also strive to avoid the improper influence of advertising or commercial considerations, and attempt to be fair in our headlines, news teasers and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations.

**CORRECTING ERRORS:** We encourage readers to point out factual errors and promise prompt, public correction of those we can verify.

## GENERAL GUIDELINES

We believe that a well-informed public helps to ensure justice and preserve democracy. The journalist's job is to advance those social goals by presenting truthful, fair, and balanced accounts of events and issues. Conscientious journalists strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of credibility.

The Vermont Guardian shares a dedication to ethical behavior. In gathering, reporting and interpreting information, we ask that contributors commit themselves to honesty, fairness, courage, transparency, independence, compassion, and respect for the rights of others. We urge our reporters, editors, photojournalists, free-lance writers, columnists, and others to apply the following standards and practices:

### FAIRNESS

Report and interpret honestly, striving for accuracy and disclosure of essential facts. Don't suppress relevant available information, nor give distorting emphasis. Pictures and sound also should be true and accurate. Avoid manipulation likely to mislead.

Make efforts to give the subject of any damaging report an opportunity to comment, preferably in the same report.

Respect every person's right to a fair trial.

Columns and commentaries may entail subjective ideas or passionate remarks on news relating to actual events. We welcome controversy. However, don't deny or conceal important or obvious information.

### ATTRIBUTION

Conduct all interviews with informed consent. Only quote directly what is actually said or written. Otherwise paraphrase. Meaning and context should be accurately reflected.

Attribute all information to its source as precisely as possible. Plagiarism is stealing. Always attribute fairly.

When a source seeks anonymity, don't agree without first considering the source's motives and any alternative attributable sources. Keep confidences in good faith.

Vermont has no shield law for journalists. Be very clear about what is promised:

Not for attribution: We may quote statements directly but the source may not be named, although a general description of his or her position may be given (for example, "a government official" or "a party insider").

On background: We may use the thrust of statements and generally describe the source, but we may not use direct quotes.

Off the record: We may not report the information, which can be used solely to help our own understanding or perspective. There is not much point in knowing something if it can't be reported, so this undertaking should be used sparingly, if at all. Sources who understand they are speaking to a journalist must request "off the record" before the information is given, and the journalist must verbally agree to the condition.

## DISCLOSURE & TRANSPARENCY

Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived. Do not allow personal beliefs or commitments to undermine accuracy, fairness and independence. Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.

Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information, and disclose any direct or indirect payment made for interviews, pictures or information. Where relevant, disclose any unavoidable conflicts.

## PRIVACY

Respect the right to privacy of every person. Public figures' privacy may be reduced by their public role, but relatives and friends of those in the public eye retain their own right to privacy.

Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.

Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges. Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed

## CARE AND COMPASSION

Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance. Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. At times of grief or trauma, always act with sensitivity and discretion. Never harass. Never exploit a person's vulnerability or ignorance of media practice.

Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Never knowingly endanger the life or safety of a person without informed consent.

Exercise particular care for the welfare of children in reports involving them. Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes.

Do not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief or physical or mental disability. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.

## INDEPENDENCE

Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable. Don't allow payment, gifts or other advantages to influence coverage, or improperly use your position or assignment for personal gain.

**No list of standards and practices can anticipate every situation or ethical question. Basic values often require interpretation and sometimes can conflict. Ethics requires conscientious decision-making in context. In some instances, therefore, individual standards listed above may give way to substantial considerations of public interest or harm to individuals or groups.**