

A large graphic featuring a bald eagle's head in profile, facing right, superimposed over a stylized American flag. The eagle is white with a yellow beak, set against a dark blue background. The flag's stripes are in shades of blue and red, with white stars. The entire graphic is set against a dark blue background that transitions to a lighter blue gradient on the right side.

THE FBI's  
**Guiding  
Principles**

TOUCHSTONE DOCUMENT ON TRAINING  
2012

*At various times in our history, including in our post-September 11, 2001 environment, the United States of America has confronted terrorists.<sup>1</sup> Many terrorists seek to justify their crimes by claiming to be fulfilling their political, religious, or social beliefs. It is imperative for the FBI to familiarize personnel with these belief systems so we can understand what motivates violent extremists, and, equally important, to uphold the constitutional system of government we are sworn to protect. The FBI must distinguish between protected thought and speech and illegal action that may be taken in whole or in part based on such ideology. In other words, thoughts alone are never illegal and extremist speech rarely is unless it incites imminent lawless activity or constitutes a true threat. To achieve its goals, the FBI's training must be accurate, based on current intelligence, and adhere to the FBI's core values, including rigorous obedience to the United States Constitution, fairness, and respect for the dignity of all those we protect.*

*Public service is a public trust. The public has committed to the FBI's care the safety of our nation and the defense of our Constitution. To sustain this trust and to meet our resulting obligations, we must adhere strictly to our core values. The FBI is rightfully held by the public to the highest ethical and professional standards. Consistent with these principles, FBI investigative activity is to be performed with care to protect individual rights and to ensure that investigations are confined to matters of legitimate law enforcement and national security interest.*

*Consistent with the training guidance issued by the Deputy Attorney General in March 2012, training undertaken by the FBI must comply with the following three principles:*

**1. Training must conform to constitutional principles and adhere to the FBI's core values.**

FBI training must emphasize the protection of civil rights and civil liberties.<sup>2</sup> Training must clearly distinguish between constitutionally protected statements and activities designed to achieve political, social, or other objectives, and violent extremism, which is characterized by the use, threatened use, or advocacy<sup>3</sup> of use of force or violence (when directed at and likely to incite imminent lawless activity) in violation of federal law to further a movement's social or political ideologies. This distinction includes recognition of the corresponding principle that mere association with organizations that demonstrate both legitimate (advocacy) and illicit (violent extremism) objectives should not automatically result in a determination that the associated individual is acting in furtherance of the organization's illicit objective(s).

Training must emphasize that no investigative or intelligence collection activity may be based solely on race, ethnicity, national origin, or religious affiliation.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, training must focus on behavioral indicators that have a potential nexus to terrorist or criminal activity, while making clear that religious expression, protest activity, and the espousing of political or ideological beliefs are constitutionally protected activities that must not be equated with terrorism or criminality absent other indicia of such offenses.

**2. Training must be tailored to the intended audience, focused to ensure message clarity, and supported with appropriate course materials.**

Training must serve its intended audiences in the execution of their duties within their areas of responsibility. To be effective, training must meet relevant and articulated objectives, convey knowledge, and promote opportunities for further dialogue and learning.

Training curricula must be in standardized formats with associated training materials to conform to the best practices as embodied within these guiding principles.

### **3. Training must be reviewed and trainers must be knowledgeable of applicable subject material.**

Current and prospective trainers must be assessed according to their ability to adhere to the standards enumerated in this document, their subject matter expertise, training techniques, and professionalism. All written materials must be reviewed carefully by supervisory-level personnel possessing an appropriate level of understanding of relevant topics.

Original authors and supervisory personnel should not hesitate to consult FBI Academy training staff in Quantico, Virginia, who may serve as a useful source of information and oversight when developing or reviewing training, particularly with respect to ensuring that training meets defined goals and adheres to these guiding principles.

Supervisory assessments must include a review of a prospective trainer's education and experience in the

training subject matter. The prospective trainer's résumé must reflect appropriate subject matter expertise and training experience. Relevant training material and feedback must be solicited from other agencies or FBI audiences who have received training, and when feasible, feedback should be solicited from knowledgeable community partners. A trainer's cultural background and/or law enforcement experience may not be a substitute for substantive knowledge and training experience.

Evaluations of trainers and training material must be conducted both during and after a course and must provide constructive feedback, if necessary, to ensure any problem areas are identified and corrected in a timely manner. To the extent available, this includes appropriate research as part of any assessment of a prospective trainer to identify in advance any agenda the prospective trainer may seek to advance as part of FBI training contrary to these guiding principles and the FBI's core values.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The terms "terrorist" and "terrorism" are to be understood as they are defined in Section 2331 of Title 18, United States Code, namely the commission of acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any state, or that would be a criminal violation if committed within the jurisdiction of the United States or of any state, which appear to be intended to (i) intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.

<sup>2</sup>See Domestic Investigations and Operations Guide (DIOG), especially Section 4: Privacy and Civil Liberties, and Least Intrusive Methods.

<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., 18 U.S.C. 2385, Advocating Overthrow of Government.

<sup>4</sup>See DIOG § 4.3.1, Equal Protection under the Law, Introduction; see also Department of Justice, "Guidance Regarding the Use of Race by Federal Law Enforcement Agencies," June 2003.