



EASTLAN
R A T I N G S

Ratings Bias and Ratings Distortion

Radio Broadcasters Guide to Best Practices

eastlanratings.com



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Ethical & Operational Standards

The NAB's Committee on Local Radio Audience Measurement (COLRAM) the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA), Radio Advertising Bureau (RAB) Goals Committee and the Media Ratings Council (MRC) have all released official statements opposing ratings bias and ratings distortion. Eastlan Ratings joins these significant professional organizations in condemning actions taken by radio stations, whether commercial or non-commercial, that intentionally bias or distort audience measurement studies being conducted within their market area. Biasing activities include exhorting the public to cooperate in ratings surveys. It is a commonly held belief that station announcements (over the air or via the station's website) or other station practices specifically targeting survey respondents severely detract from the validity and reliability of audience measurement research.

Eastlan Ratings offers the following ethical and operational standards related to ratings bias and ratings distortion. These best practices were developed with input from COLRAM, MRC, radio industry leaders, advertising agency executives and Eastlan Ratings' Advisory Board. Adherence to these guidelines is necessary to maintain the basic objectives of valid and reliable audience measurement.



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Ratings Bias

How is it defined? Any announcement, statement or activity that could alert or sensitize respondents or potential respondents that an audience measurement study is being conducted within their market area can be construed as ratings bias. The ratings biasing activities are not limited to on-air announcements. They could be in print, on the station website, within the social media, in a television ad, over the phone, via electronic or digital messaging (ie: IM, text, tweet) or in most any other media. The most common form of ratings bias occurs when a radio station informs listeners that an audience measurement study is being or will soon be conducted. It is Eastlan Ratings' opinion that reminding of the need for participation in the research and/or the need to be honest when participating in the study are additional forms of ratings bias



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Ratings Distortion

These are station activities that Eastlan Ratings determines may influence survey respondents to report radio listening in excess of their actual radio usage. Ratings Distortion may also include attempting to contact or influence survey respondents by telephone or other means.

At the outset of each interview, Eastlan Ratings probes for media affiliation. Employees of radio stations and their family members are not eligible to participate. Should any station employee discover a staff member or family member has participated in an Eastlan Ratings survey, Eastlan Ratings should be contacted immediately.



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Ratings Bias & Ratings Distortion Violations

When Eastlan Ratings determines a station has engaged in activities with the potential to cause ratings bias and/or ratings distortion, several outcomes may result. Deliberate and/or repeated violations may result in the station's call letters and audience estimates being deleted in all research reports. Consequences in situations Eastlan Ratings determines to be less severe may include any combination of the following: the violations being noted in the research reports, the station being flagged in all mediums used to analyze the research reports, a separate "official notice of violation" being delivered to all subscribers, the violating station's call letters being listed out of alphabetical order and the station's audience estimates being listed out of rank order (sometimes referred to as being listed "below the line").

Eastlan Ratings maintains the option to use any available means to ensure that any and all persons are made aware of any station activity that has the potential to impact the validity, reliability or credibility of any of its audience estimate reports. Eastlan Ratings, at its sole discretion, shall determine the appropriate action in each incident of violation.



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Grievance Procedure

Grievances of ratings bias or ratings distortion should be set forth in writing and detail specifically the alleged violations. The grievance should include a recording (audio cassette or MP3), newspaper clipping, direct mail piece or printed copy of a website that is the subject of the grievance.



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Investigation Process

Eastlan Ratings will investigate all claims of ratings bias and ratings distortion. Should Eastlan Ratings determine, solely at its discretion, that a violation may have occurred, Eastlan Ratings will have acted reasonably if it gives the allegedly offending station written notice of what could have caused bias or distortion, presents evidence to support such claims, and gives the station a reasonable opportunity (usually 24 hours) to correct the situation.

In no event shall Eastlan Ratings be liable for incidental or consequential damages or be subject to injunctive relief in the event estimates of a station's listening are deleted, noted, flagged or listed out of order due to ratings bias or ratings distortion.



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Play It Safe

If you are uncertain as to whether your planned station activity may constitute ratings bias or ratings distortion, we would encourage you to contact Eastlan Ratings for a confidential review.

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