

# Words That Work: A Toolkit for Newsrooms

A research-based toolkit to help teams communicate the value of local news

**Press  
Forward**   
A NEW STORY FOR LOCAL NEWS

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## Strong Communities Depend on Strong Local News

Those who create and champion local news already recognize it as essential to building strong, connected communities. However, **effectively communicating that value to community members, sources, and stakeholders** requires more than passion; it takes strategic messaging and careful adaptation for each audience that **respects both your editorial independence and your community role**.

The messages in this toolkit were drafted based on the results of a national public opinion survey, focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and public message testing. Across these research approaches, we examined public attitudes, trust levels, and values regarding local news to inform the creation of a data-driven roadmap for reaching diverse audiences.

We used those insights to deliver research-backed messages, phrases, and framing approaches that build philanthropic support and drive subscriptions for local news.

### What This Toolkit Does

- Helps you articulate the value of local news
- Provides language you can use to make the case for funding opportunities
- Offers practical guidance for community engagement while maintaining editorial independence
- Shows you how to demonstrate your community role without compromising journalistic standards
- Gives you research-backed responses to common questions and skepticism

Participants at CheckCon in Beirut, a 2018 gathering of fact-checking organizations hosted by Meedan.  
Photo by Stephanie Ghanem.



On the cover: BLCK Press Founder Georgia Fort covers a march where more than 100 moms from across the country whose children were killed by police came to Minnesota after George Floyd's murder.  
Credit: Uzoma Obasi.

## About This Toolkit

This toolkit was commissioned by **Press Forward**, a network with chapters nationwide, working to strengthen local news and the communities it serves.

It was developed by **Beekeeper Group**, a strategic communications and public affairs firm with strategy, research, and storytelling at its core. Beekeeper translates insights into practical tools that help organizations of all kinds demonstrate their value and build stronger support in the communities they serve.

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## Research Methodology

This toolkit draws on an extensive body of original research commissioned by **Press Forward** and conducted by **Beekeeper Group**. The goal was to understand how Americans view local news, how those views differ across communities, and which messages most effectively inspire trust, connection, and action.

### National Survey

From April 17–23, 2025, we conducted an online survey of 3,001 U.S. adults in English and Spanish. The study included a nationally representative sample of 1,501 adults, plus oversamples of 300 each from five key groups: adults ages 18–29, conservatives, progressives, Spanish-speakers, and Black/African Americans. The survey carries a margin of error of  $\pm 2.5\%$  at the 95% confidence level, with results stratified to reflect the U.S. adult population by geography, gender, and political affiliation.

### In-Depth Interviews

To supplement the survey, we conducted qualitative interviews with a broad set of stakeholders including high-net-worth individuals, journalists, philanthropic foundations, and other community funders to explore attitudes toward local news, motivations for support, and perceived barriers.

### Focus Groups

We facilitated multiple focus groups to capture the lived experiences and perspectives of specific communities. This included groups with 18–29 year olds, conservatives, and Spanish-speakers, as well as seven place-based discussions in Atlanta, GA; Akron, OH; Tucson, AZ; Eastern Kentucky; Wichita, KS; Lancaster County, PA; and Charleston, WV.

### Message Alignment Testing

We then completed structured message alignment testing with five key stakeholder groups to evaluate how different frames, themes, and narratives resonated across audiences.

## Random-Control Testing

Finally, we conducted randomized control testing with nearly 5,250 respondents to measure which messages most effectively shifted attitudes and intentions around supporting local news.

Taken together, this research offers a detailed picture of how Americans view local news and provides practical guidance on how to talk about its value in ways that resonate.

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## Key Research Findings for Newsroom Context

To build this toolkit, we started by listening at scale. We conducted a nationwide survey with over 3,000 people, including oversamples of key groups we wanted to understand. We tested various ways to talk about local news, including frames that highlight its value from different angles, and measured which ones inspired the most connection and action. Then we pressure-tested those top contenders through focus groups, interviews, and message experiments to see what truly stuck. The result was a set of messages you can feel confident using, because they're grounded in both what people say and what actually moves them.

Before diving into the messages, we want to share some of the research insights we uncovered. There was one piece of data that we want to highlight first:

Americans overwhelmingly value local news and information, and **more than eight in ten respondents say they feel they can easily find and access trustworthy local news** and information. They cite local TV, social media platforms, and community newspapers as their top sources, and also the most trusted. On the surface, this suggests that people don't see a shortage of local news access.

What's missing in the data is a critical nuance: perception doesn't match reality. Even as newsrooms close and beats disappear, many Americans believe they are still "covered" because they can find information somewhere, whether that's on

**What this means for you:** When making appeals, don't lead with scarcity ("local news is dying"), because most people don't feel that gap. Instead, emphasize *quality, depth, and accountability*:

- People think they have enough information, but it's often surface-level. Local news provides the context, verification, and accountability reporting they won't get elsewhere.
- Support ensures that trusted, independent coverage remains strong and available when it matters most — especially in emergencies, policy debates, and community decision-making.

Facebook or in a community newsletter. The public doesn't necessarily distinguish between *depth* and *breadth*, or between fact-checked reporting and unverified posts.

In short, the public doesn't believe they have an *access* problem. They *do* have a **quality and sustainability problem**. That's the gap your newsroom needs to explain and show supporters and subscribers why their support is essential.

Here are some of the other topline from the data collected during our national surveys:

- **Respondents reported** that the most important features a local source of information can deliver are providing information during emergencies, holding leaders accountable, and keeping people informed about local issues. In subscription messaging, newsrooms should center on emergency preparedness and accountability.
- **Americans maintain a strong appreciation** for local news, with overwhelming majorities recognizing its importance for community building and democratic participation. Americans feel confident they can access trustworthy local information when they need it, and a supermajority (66%) use local news and information to help make everyday decisions. Additionally, over nine-in-ten (93%) agree that reliable local news and information are necessary for democracy to work properly.
- **The survey data reveal strong foundational support** for local news across American communities. When asked directly, 87% of respondents say that local news matters to them personally. While this percentage drops somewhat among 18-29 year olds to 77%, it remains substantial across all demographic groups, suggesting that even younger Americans who consume news differently still recognize its importance. This tells us that local news matters to Americans, even if they aren't taking action to support it.
- **Over a supermajority (70%)** prefer the term "Local news and information" to "Community news and information." "Journalism" didn't rank in the top three trusted terms for any demographic group studied. "News" and "information" were significantly preferred across demographics.

### **We Are Cautious About Using the Words "Journalism" and "Media"**

While we heard throughout the research that people value the role of local news, the word "journalism" can evoke partisanship or elitism for some audiences, while "media" sounds like entertainment to many people. In our research, "local news and information" consistently tested better than "journalism," with participants expressing concerns that "journalism" felt too institutional or politically charged.



- **Nearly nine-in-ten (89%)** say it is important to find new ways to fund local information sources in their community. When asked about willingness to pay for trusted local news regardless of current payment status, 70% of all respondents expressed willingness to pay something, with most aligning in the \$10 and under monthly range (once the context of local news being in crisis was explained).
- **The demographic most willing to pay makes between \$100,000 - \$200,000 annually, and tend to be more progressive.** The demographic groups showing resistance to payment tend to concentrate among respondents above age 55 and those making under \$50,000 annually. Understanding that local news is in crisis is important, as respondents were largely unaware that traditional funding models are no longer working.
- **Among respondents who use social media** for local news, Facebook and Instagram generally lead usage patterns. However, rural users show a distinct preference for Facebook, with TikTok performing slightly better than Instagram in these communities. Most dramatically, 18–29-year-olds demonstrate entirely different social media consumption patterns, with Instagram and TikTok tying for first place, followed by Facebook.
- **Nearly all (96%)** respondents agree that local news and information builds a stronger community and supports fair decisions. An overwhelming 93% of respondents support having independent local news and information sources in their communities. This near-universal support, with 62% strongly agreeing and 28% somewhat agreeing, suggests that Americans understand and value the principle of independent local journalism, even if they may not always engage with it directly.
- **Over nine-in-ten (93%) say local news is necessary for democracy**, showing that its civic role strongly resonates. However, overtly political language can be polarizing and may reduce trust among audiences who are already cautious about media. The most effective approach is to emphasize how local news keeps people informed, connected, and engaged, without leaning on language that could be read as partisan.
- **When asked to rank their top three community concerns, 35% of respondents believe that the top issue is improving safety from crime and drugs**, 33% said reducing local taxes and fees, followed by creating more affordable housing (30%), addressing homelessness (26%), improving local infrastructure (25%), and improving the quality of local schools (24%) among other responses. Around 15% listed ensuring residents have access to reliable, fact-based information in their communities.

## What This Means for Your Daily Work:

- **87% of people say local news matters personally**, which means your work has broad community value; don't hesitate to represent it confidently.
- **People prioritize safety and accountability information**, which indicates it can help to frame your discussions in these terms.
- **"Journalism" and "journalist" test poorly**. We recommend leading with your function, not your title.
- **People want "local information" and "community connection."** Whenever possible, emphasize your local knowledge and relationships.

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## Words to Use

The following words resonated well across all demographics. Try to incorporate them into your messaging about local news.

- Local information
- Local news
- Community
- Neutral
- Trustworthy (with proof and support)
- Unbiased
- Fact-based
- Independent
- Fair
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Civic engagement
- Safety



Qcity Metro reporter Destiniece Jaram conducts an interview at the opening of a small business hub Credit: QCity Metro

## Phrases to Use

The following phrases resonated well across all demographics. Try to incorporate them into your messaging about local news.

- Local news is a public good
  - Unbiased local information
  - Trustworthy news
  - Trustworthy local information
  - Local news as a civic utility (like roads or schools)
  - News as a community connection
  - Emphasis on practical outcomes — safety, accountability, participation
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## Words to Avoid

As noted above, our research indicates that while people value local news and information, they tend to react less positively to the terms "*journalism*" and "*journalists*."

- Across every demographic, "local news" and "local information" consistently tested higher in trust and connection.
- "Journalism" was often associated with bias, opinion, or national politics — even when respondents supported their local paper or broadcast.
- The gap isn't about the work itself. It's about the *label*. People respect the service but are wary of the terminology.

### What this means for you:

- We did not test the descriptors of the people doing the work, but based on our research, we see strong value in leading with your function, not your title. Instead of "As journalists, we...", try "As your local newsroom, we..." or "Our job is to provide fact-based information you can use every day."
- When you do use the word journalist, we recommend anchoring it in trust and accountability: "Our journalists live here too — their credibility depends on accuracy and fairness."



- When in doubt, pivot to phrases that tested well: *local news, local information, community reporting, independent, fact-based, trustworthy, accountability.*

**Bottom line:** People don't dislike what you do. They dislike what they *think* "journalism" means. Position yourself as a provider of trusted local information, and you'll avoid unnecessary barriers in conversations.

**Why We Avoid "Democracy"** - Here's the paradox: 93% of people believe reliable local news is necessary for democracy, yet many of these same people react negatively to explicit "democracy" messaging. This happens because of a disconnect between cognitive and emotional responses. People intellectually understand the connection but emotionally resist being told about it. Years of political messaging have created fatigue around the word "democracy," and it now triggers partisan defenses regardless of people's actual beliefs.

The main solution? Don't avoid the concept, avoid the word.

Lead with concrete benefits people already value, let audiences make the democracy connection themselves. Instead of saying "Local news protects democracy" to most audiences, try "Local news keeps you informed about decisions affecting your taxes, schools, and safety."

The following words resonated poorly across all demographics. Try to avoid them in your messaging about local news.

- Democracy (when used as a political appeal)
- Republican
- Democrat
- Marginalized (without clear civic relevance)
- Political
- Storytelling
- Healthy or Unhealthy (when referring to communities)
- Nonpartisan
- Objective



L.A. Taco investigative reporter Lexis Oliver-Ray. Credit: Brian Feinzimer for L.A. TACO

## Phrases to Avoid

The following phrases resonated poorly across many demographics. Try to avoid them in your messaging about local news.

- Local news matters to our democracy
  - Journalists are essential to reporting local news that impacts communities
  - Support local journalism
  - Protect democracy
  - Amplify marginalized voices
  - Local news is important to healthy communities
  - We all must play a part in funding local news
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## Audience Nuances

### *By Political Orientation*

#### Conservatives

##### **What to know:**

- Local news is valued for its relevance and verifiability; national news is often seen as politicized or disconnected from daily life.
- “Democracy” framing polarizes, motivating some, turning off others.
- People make clear distinctions between “local news” (factual reporting), “local information” (community logistics), and “journalism” (seen as subjective or narrative).
- Community stories and neighbor connections are especially strong motivators.

## What works:

- Position local news as useful and people-focused.
- Address practical priorities: safety, housing, and local governance.
- Include positive contributions and solutions alongside accountability.

## Messaging tips:

- “Local news provides the facts you need to make decisions about your community.”
- “Strong communities need reliable information about what’s happening locally.”
- Avoid abstract ideals like “protecting democracy” or national political references.

## Progressives

### What to know:

- Government accountability is the top value driver.
- Solution-oriented and positive coverage resonates, particularly stories people “might not have seen otherwise.”
- View local news as a tool for civic engagement and personal action, not just identity.

Talon Marks staff writer Edward Fernandez questions a Cerritos College student on a new plastic ban on campus.  
Credit: Ryan Sumida



**What works:**

- Spotlight accountability and unique community solutions.
- Emphasize content they can't get elsewhere.

**Messaging tips:**

- "Local news holds leaders accountable and highlights community solutions."
- "Strong communities need someone keeping an eye on local institutions."
- Avoid generic "community pride" messages without a call to action.

***By Age*****Under 30****What to know:**

- See local news as niche and personal, but sometimes trivial.
- Want substance on elections, policy, and civic opportunities.
- Trust organizations more than individuals, citing brand and editorial rigor.
- Heavy consumers of Instagram and TikTok for local content.

**What works:**

- Use connection and shared benefits without political overtones.
- Frame local news as a public service, like parks or libraries.
- Deliver quick, visual, neighborhood-specific content.

**Messaging tips:**

- "Local news is as essential as parks and libraries."
- "Like sidewalks and streetlights, local news keeps communities connected."
- Distribute via TikTok, Instagram, local influencers, and curated newsletters.

## *By Language and Cultural Lens*

### Spanish Speakers

#### **What to know:**

- Prioritize local coverage over state/national because it directly affects families.
- Skeptical of vague or politicized terms like “reimagine” and “recruit.”
- Clear distinctions between news, information, and journalism; nostalgia for deeper reporting.
- Value neighbor connection and public good; less driven by “action information.”

#### **What works:**

- Focus on tangible benefits for families: schools, safety, services.
- Provide Spanish-language content and culturally relevant framing.

#### **Messaging tips:**

- “Local news helps families make better decisions.”
- “Strong communities and strong local news go hand in hand.”
- Avoid overly abstract language.

### African Americans

#### **What to know:**

- Highly value hyperlocal coverage and updates that help residents stay involved.
- See philanthropic funding as an important factor.
- “Public good” framing underperforms; accountability resonates more.

#### **What works:**

- Emphasize accountability role and transparency.
- Highlight philanthropic and donor support as a safeguard for local news.



**Messaging tips:**

- “Strong communities need someone keeping an eye on local institutions.”
- “Local news ensures transparency in local government.”
- Avoid “public good” framing; use accountability and connection instead.

***By Rural/Suburban/Urban Affiliation*****Urban****What to know:**

- Respond well to language about clarity, focus, and elevating community voices.
- More receptive to civic trust and accountability framing than rural audiences.

**What works:**

- Highlight how local news filters relevant information from the noise.
- Emphasize its role in strengthening trust, ensuring accountability, and empowering residents.

**Messaging tips:**

- “In an era of information overload, local news cuts through the noise, spotlights local issues, and elevates community voices.”
- “Investing in local news strengthens civic trust, ensures accountability, and empowers communities.”
- “Local news provides trustworthy information about what’s happening in your community.”

**Rural****What to know:**

- Turned off by terms like “democracy,” “journalism,” and “healthy communities.”
- Value straightforward, unbiased reporting and local impact.

**What works:**

- Focus on tangible, everyday usefulness of local information.
- Frame funding as essential to keeping local information alive.

**Messaging tips:**

- "Local news provides raw, unbiased information that directly impacts the community."
- "Access to local news strengthens communities, holds institutions accountable, and encourages civic engagement."

**Suburban****What to know:**

- Motivated by practical decision-making and staying informed on local changes.
- Open to civic connection framing when tied to factual, local reporting.

**What works:**

- Emphasize local news as a tool for making personal and community decisions.
- Position it as a stabilizing force in polarized times.

**Messaging tips:**

- "Local news empowers you to make decisions — from school board meetings to zoning changes."
- "In a time of polarization, local reporting provides a fact-based foundation for staying connected."
- "Local news provides trustworthy information about what's happening in your community."

# How to Talk About Local News

## **Local news connects people and strengthens communities.**

Reliable reporting gives neighbors the trust, connection, and resilience they need to face challenges together.

## **Local news focuses on things that matter to you.**

Coverage of school board decisions, local elections, public safety, or community events won't come from a national newsroom. These are stories only we tell, and they are essential for people making daily choices that affect their families and neighborhoods.

## **Local news is a public good.**

Like sidewalks, parks, or schools, local news creates shared benefits that extend beyond any single subscriber. Our reporting links people to resources, ideas, and solutions that strengthen civic life. Shared investment ensures these benefits reach everyone.

*Note: If "public good" feels too abstract for your community, you can also use the phrase "Local news serves the public." In focus groups, this phrase was perceived as synonymous with "public good," and it also performed well in our research.*

## **Support sustains service.**

Subscriptions, memberships, donations, and philanthropic investments are investments in our community — they are what keep fact-based information flowing when communities need it most. Sustained support empowers us to respond quickly and reliably to crises, elections, and everyday concerns.

## **Local news keeps power accountable.**

Without us, decisions can happen behind closed doors. With us, communities stay informed and can actively participate in shaping their future.

## **We provide an antidote to misinformation.**

Local reporting grounds people in facts that are verifiable and relevant to their daily lives. By creating a shared baseline of information, local news helps neighbors disagree without being disagreeable, building space for common ground even when views differ.

### **The funding model has shifted.**

A lot of factors have converged to change our industry. Communities, through individual support, institutional investment, and philanthropy, must step in to close the gap.

### **Investment fuels innovation.**

Community support doesn't just keep the lights on. It enables experimentation, growth, and new models that expand reach and relevance.

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# Making the Case: Underscoring the Value of Local News

Supporting local news isn't just about keeping journalism alive—it's about strengthening the communities we all rely on. People already believe local news has value; the challenge is turning that belief into action. This section gives you research-backed frames, tested phrases, and practical tools to help you connect that conviction to real support from donors, subscribers, foundations, and partners.

## **Core Frames**

These are the building blocks — the messages you can return to again and again. They were tested nationally and consistently resonated across political orientation, geography, and age groups.

ecoRI News reporter Colleen Cronin interviews formerly incarcerated men participating in a green jobs reentry training program in Providence, R.I.  
Image: Joanna Detz/ecoRI News



## Accountability

**Why it works:** Accountability and oversight resonate across the political spectrum. This frame positions local news as a **community service**, not a private business.

**Core Message:** “Strong communities need someone keeping an eye on local institutions. Local news holds leaders accountable, informs neighbors about decisions, and ensures transparency.”

**General Public:** “Local news keeps an eye on your city council, school board, and other leaders to make sure they’re doing what’s best for your community.”

**Funders/Polymakers:** “Local news provides essential oversight that strengthens institutions and ensures government transparency at the community level.”

**Conservatives/Right-Leaning:** “Local news protects your tax dollars by following the money and exposing government overreach.”

**Progressives/Civic-Minded:** “Local news holds power accountable and ensures every voice in the community has access to the information they need.”

**Rural Communities:** “Local news makes sure your county commissioners and school board are looking out for your interests.”

**Under 30:** “Local news calls out the people making decisions that affect your rent, your job prospects, and your future.”

**Spanish-Speaking Communities:** “Las noticias locales vigilan a los líderes locales para asegurar que tomen decisiones transparentes que beneficien a toda nuestra comunidad.”

**Black/African American:** “Local news ensures your community’s concerns are heard and that local leaders are held accountable to serve everyone fairly.”

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## Public Good

*“Local news is a public good. Like sidewalks, parks, or schools, it benefits everyone. Our reporting keeps people informed, connected, and ready to act.”*

**Why it works:** Makes the value of local news tangible. Shared benefit framing encourages collective investment, not just individual purchase.



**Core Message:** "Local news is a public good. Like sidewalks, parks, or schools, it benefits everyone. Our reporting keeps people informed, connected, and ready to act."

**General Public:** "Local news is a public good. Like sidewalks, parks, or schools, it benefits everyone. Everyone benefits when the whole community stays informed and connected."

**Funders/Polymakers:** "Local news supports informed decision-making and community resilience."

**Conservatives/Right-Leaning:** "Local news helps communities stay strong and self-reliant without outside interference."

**Progressives/Civic-Minded:** "Local news creates the informed community foundation necessary for meaningful civic participation and social progress."

**Rural Communities:** "Local news connects neighbors and helps small communities work together to solve problems and support each other."

**Under 30:** "Local news keeps everyone in the loop about what's happening and how to get involved."

**Spanish-Speaking Communities:** "Las noticias locales son un bien público que beneficia a toda la comunidad, manteniéndonos informados y unidos."

**Black/African American:** "Local news serves the whole community by ensuring everyone has access to the information they need to thrive."

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## Personal Relevance

*"Without local news, communities lose access to information that shapes daily life — from schools to public safety to local businesses."*

**Why it works:** Grounds support in people's lived experience and daily decisions, rather than abstract ideals.

**Core Message:** "Local news gives you information that shapes daily life from schools to public safety to local businesses."

**General Public:** "Local news tells you what you need to know about your schools, your safety, and your neighborhood businesses."

**Funders/Polymakers:** "Local news provides residents with actionable information that directly impacts their daily decisions and quality of life."

**Conservatives/Right-Leaning:** "Local news focuses on the practical information families need, not politics, just facts about schools, safety, and local opportunities."

**Progressives/Civic-Minded:** "Local news ensures everyone has equal access to information about education, public safety, and economic opportunities."

**Rural Communities:** "Local news covers the things that matter to your daily life, from road conditions to school closures to local business openings."

**Under 30:** "Local news covers the stuff that actually affects your life like housing, jobs, transportation, and local events worth checking out."

**Spanish-Speaking Communities:** "Las noticias locales cubren lo que importa para su familia y vida diaria: escuelas, seguridad pública, y oportunidades en su vecindario."

**Black/African American:** "Local news covers the issues that directly impact your family and neighborhood — education, safety, and community resources."

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## Crisis Response

*"When there's a flood, wildfire, or public health emergency, local news is the lifeline people rely on."*

**Why it works:** Emergencies cut through noise and highlight news as an essential service.

**Core Message:** "When there's a flood, wildfire, or public health emergency, local news is the lifeline people rely on."

**General Public:** "Local news gives you real-time updates when emergencies happen."

**Funders/Polymakers:** "Local news provides communities with reliable emergency communication that saves lives during crises."

**Conservatives/Right-Leaning:** "Local news delivers trusted facts from people who know your area during emergencies."

**Progressives/Civic-Minded:** "Local news ensures everyone gets equal access to life-saving emergency information."

**Rural Communities:** “Local news tells you which roads are closed and where to find help when storms hit.”

**Under 30:** “Local news gives you emergency updates for your exact location when disasters strike.”

**Spanish-Speaking Communities:** “Las noticias locales proporcionan información de emergencia en tiempo real para mantener segura a nuestra comunidad.”

**Black/African American:** “Local news delivers timely, accurate emergency information that keeps your community safe.”

## Relational Trust

*“You know us because we live here too. Our credibility comes from showing up, listening, and reporting with care.”*

**Why it works:** People trust information more when it comes from recognizable local voices.

**Core Message:** “You know us because we live here too. Our credibility comes from showing up, listening, and reporting with care.”

**General Public:** “Local news is told by people who live here, know our neighborhoods, and share our concerns.”

**Funders/ Policymakers:** “Local news is created by people who have the trust and relationships needed to reach and serve their communities effectively.”

**Conservatives/Right-Leaning:** “Local news comes from people you know and trust — not outsiders with an agenda.”

**Progressives/Civic-Minded:** “Local news is created by community members who understand the issues and values we share.”

**Rural Communities:** “Your local news is written by your neighbors — people you see at the store, church, or ballgame.”



Inderjeet Singh Brar tells California Health Report Senior Reporter Claudia Boyd-Barrett about how the Jakara Movement, a community-led health program, helped him sign up for rental assistance and health coverage.  
Photo by Sahibjit Singh.

**Under 30:** “Local news is made by people who know what’s going on here because they’re part of it.”

**Spanish-Speaking Communities:** “Las noticias locales provienen de periodistas que conocen y entienden a nuestra comunidad.”

**Black/African American:** “Local news matters to you and your neighborhood because it is created by people within your community.”

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# Making the Case: Asking for Support

Local news practitioners know instinctively that their work matters. But translating that conviction into **sustainable financial support** requires using the right language, tailored to the right audience, in the right moment. This section gives you research-backed frames, tested phrases, and practical tools you can use to **make direct appeals** to donors, subscribers, foundations, and partners.

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## How (and When) to Talk About the Financial Crisis in Local News

- **Don’t lead with collapse.** The financial crisis is real, but opening with doom-and-gloom makes audiences feel hopeless. Instead, start with the value local news provides—then connect it to the resources needed to keep delivering that value.
- **Use the crisis as context, not the headline.** Frame it as: “Here’s what’s at risk if support doesn’t grow” rather than “Everything is failing.”
- **Balance urgency with agency.** Pair the warning with a clear action people can take: subscribing, donating, or partnering.
- **Tailor for audience.** With funders, it may be appropriate to name the crisis directly and back it with data (closures, layoffs, coverage gaps). With community members, connect the dots to lived experience: “When the newsroom shrinks, fewer people cover school board meetings and zoning decisions that affect your neighborhood.”

- **Keep community at the center.** Make the financial crisis about the impact on people's access to information and community well-being, not just newsroom balance sheets.

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## The Subscription Opportunity

Our research found that nearly 70% of Americans say they're willing to pay for local news they trust, but only a quarter actually subscribe. Closing that gap requires messaging that connects the act of subscribing to what people truly value, trust, relevance, and community impact. Subscriptions aren't just transactions; they're statements about what matters.

People subscribe when they:

- Trust the source of news (the top motivator)
- See personal relevance to daily life
- Want to support their community
- Value independence and fact-based reporting

**Certain words consistently build trust:** Fact-based, Independent, Fair, Trustworthy

Avoid terms like "unbiased" or abstract appeals to "democracy" without community context. The strongest messages emphasize reliability and connection to place.

The following are draft subscription messages and examples, rooted in the tested frames of trust, personal relevance, community impact, and independence. They are designed to be flexible starting points, not final copy, and can be tailored to fit your newsroom's voice and audience.

A Boyle Heights Beat youth news reporter conducts interviews before a Candidate Forum Resource Fair.  
Credit: Andrew Lopez





## Paywalls

Explore ways to treat a paywall like an invitation. Instead of “you’ve run out of free articles,” use language that affirms the reader’s engagement and nudges them towards joining.

- “You clearly value local news - support it for [include price point].”
- “Join [number] neighbors keeping local news strong.”
- “Try 30 days free to see what a difference local news coverage makes.”

If you’re observing subscription fatigue, you can reposition as:

- “Your support makes a difference in our community.”
- “This is not just another streaming service - it’s an investment in where you live.”

## Subscription Appeal Emails

Email is where you can showcase impact, exclusivity, and community. Lead with tangible outcomes, not just headlines.

Subject lines that spark action: “How our reporting saved residents \$200,000 in taxes” or “Your neighbors are supporting local news - join them.”

Body copy should highlight accountability wins, include subscriber testimonials, and always tie back to community benefit.

Think of email as storytelling with a clear call to action and show why subscribing matters, then make it effortless to do.

## Landing Pages

This is where intent becomes commitment. Keep the design simple and the value front and center.

- Clear, trust-building language: fact-based, independent, fair, trustworthy.
- Visible impact metrics (“300 stories published last year,” “25 public meetings covered”).

A strong landing page doesn’t just sell a product - it reassures readers they’re investing in something bigger than themselves.

## Audience-Specific Funding Appeals

Every audience responds differently. Use the frames above to tailor your pitch depending on who you're talking to.

### Community Donors & Subscribers

- **Core appeal:** "Your support keeps independent local information flowing, ensuring neighbors stay informed and leaders stay accountable."
- **Sample Phrases:**
  - "A subscription is not just payment for a product, it's an investment in our community"
  - "Even small monthly contributions ensure fact-based coverage is available to everyone."
- **Best frames to use:** Personal relevance, relational trust, accountability.

### Local Businesses

- **Core appeal:** "Strong local news builds strong communities. Informed communities are more stable, engaged, and better for business."
- **Sample Phrases:**
  - "Supporting local news is an investment in the community you depend on."
  - "Strong communities—supported by strong local news—are better places to live, work, and invest."
- **Best frames to use:** Public good, solutions-oriented, and accountability.

### Foundations & Philanthropy

- **Core appeal:** "Without reliable local news, every other community investment is working in the dark. Funding local news multiplies your impact across education, health, equity, and civic engagement."
- **Sample Phrase:**
  - "This is an investment in building sustainable business models."
- **Best frames to use:** Accountability, public good, solutions-oriented.

## Policymakers & Community Leaders

- **Core appeal:** “Strong local news helps communities understand policies, track progress, and hold leaders accountable. It builds civic trust and supports effective governance.”
  - **Sample Phrases:**
    - “When residents are informed, local government works better.”
    - “Independent local news reduces polarization by ensuring everyone has access to the same facts.”
  - **Best frames to use:** Accountability, crisis response, civic life.
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## Ready-to-Use Scripts

### Foundation Appeal

“Supporting local news is one of the most effective ways to make communities stronger. Reliable reporting multiplies the impact of every other investment you make, from education to equity to economic development. When you fund local news, you are funding the connections that hold communities together”

### Donor Appeal (Individual)

“Your gift helps ensure that reliable, fact-based information is available to everyone in our community, not just those who can pay. With your support, we can keep neighbors informed, leaders accountable, and crises manageable.”

### Business Appeal

“Partnering with us is a smart investment. Strong local news creates more engaged communities, which makes local economies healthier and markets more stable. Your support strengthens both the community and your business.”

### Civic Leader Appeal

“When residents have access to strong local news, they are better informed, more engaged, and more prepared to work together. Supporting local journalism helps ensure the public has the trusted information it needs to participate in decisions, solve problems, and build stronger communities.”

## Community Appeal

"Local news is a public good that benefits everyone. It helps neighbors look out for each other, surfaces solutions, and keeps people connected to the place they call home. When you support local reporting, you are investing directly in the future of your community."

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## Adapting for Your Local Context

To make your pitch more compelling, **localize the message**:

- Name a recent example (a school board vote, flood coverage, policy change).
- Share a tangible impact story (a neighbor who used your reporting to take action).
- Highlight the impact of your work.

Tips:

- In **urban areas**, emphasize cutting through information overload and spotlighting diverse voices.
  - In **rural areas**, stress straightforward, unbiased coverage and essential access.
  - For **younger audiences**, frame local news as a public utility like libraries or parks, and use short, visual examples.
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## Addressing Common Newsroom Concerns

### "Why should we trust you?"

That's a fair question. Trust comes from accountability. I live here too, and if I get something wrong, I'll hear about it at the grocery store or the school pickup line. My credibility depends on accuracy, and I'm transparent about how I check my facts.

### "Aren't you biased?"

Our goal isn't to tell you what to think, but to give you the facts you need to make your own decisions. If you think we've missed something, we want to hear from you. Accountability is part of our job.

### **“Why don’t you cover positive stories?”**

We do — but our job is to cover what affects people’s daily lives. Sometimes that’s problems that need attention, sometimes it’s success stories worth celebrating. Both matter for a strong community.

### **“Local news doesn’t matter.”**

It may not feel urgent every day, but when the city council votes on your property taxes or when there’s a boil-water advisory in your neighborhood, local information becomes essential. Local news matters most when it’s needed most.

### **“Shouldn’t local news be free?”**

Everyone should be able to access local news, but producing it takes people, time, and resources. Advertising alone no longer covers the cost. Community support and philanthropic investment help keep it affordable and widely accessible.

### **“How is local news different from national news?”**

National outlets focus on politics and big-picture trends. We focus on what affects your neighborhood: school board decisions, local elections, road closures, business openings, and community events. Local news connects directly to your daily life.

### **“What if I don’t trust the media?”**

That’s exactly why local news matters. Unlike national outlets, we’re accountable to the same community we serve. If we get something wrong, we correct it — and we face our neighbors. Trust is earned through consistent, accurate reporting close to home.

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## **Closing Note**

Local news isn’t just about headlines: it’s the foundation that holds communities together. People already value what you do; your role is to help them see why sustaining it matters. By choosing words that connect, framing your work as essential, and inviting others to invest in something bigger than themselves, you can turn appreciation into action.

Local news is what makes every other cause stronger and with the right support, it will continue to do so for generations to come.