

# Words That Work: A Toolkit for Funders

A research-based toolkit to help you talk about local news

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A NEW STORY FOR LOCAL NEWS

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Americans believe in local news. Our recent research confirms it: most say local news matters to them, and 96% agree it strengthens their community. The real challenge isn't proving that people value local news. It's finding the language that translates that value into action.

This toolkit is for the philanthropic community. It is designed to help funders and local news advocates communicate with clarity, consistency, and research-backed messages about why local news matters. We've also developed complementary resources for newsrooms and journalism service organizations.

Understanding the landscape is the first step. While most Americans say they can still find reliable local information, the way they get it has changed. Dedicated local outlets are now competing with a patchwork of platforms and sources that can lack depth, consistency, reliability, and community connection. At the same time, local newsrooms have been shrinking for years, and whether people see it or not, every community feels the impact.

This change matters. Strong local news organizations do more than report facts; they connect neighbors, hold leaders accountable, and provide the context people need to make decisions. When that role is diminished, the community loses a trusted touchstone for shared understanding and civic engagement.

**Here's the thing: how you talk about local news determines whether people listen or tune out.**

This toolkit gives you the research-backed words, phrases, and approaches that can build support for local news. These messages were shaped and informed by a national survey, focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and public message testing. Across those research approaches, we examined public attitudes, trust levels, and values around local news to help us create this data-driven roadmap for reaching diverse audiences.

The 2024 Local News Symposium,  
hosted by the New Mexico Local  
News Fund, home to Press  
Forward New Mexico. Photo by  
Roberto Rosales.



## About This Toolkit

This toolkit was commissioned by **Press Forward**, a national 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.

## 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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By tapping into shared values, such as the demand for accurate, actionable, and community-centered information, we can help ensure that local news remains a trusted cornerstone of civic life, especially during times of emergency or crisis. The following toolkit translates these findings into messages organizations can use with funders, partners, and the public. But let's start with the big picture.



The staff of The Miami Foundation, home to Press Forward and Press Forward South Florida. Photo courtesy of The Miami Foundation.

# The Big Picture: Americans Trust Local News

There's more to the local news story than cuts and closures. The following statistics were compiled during a nationwide survey with more than 3,000 people, including deeper dives with key groups we especially wanted to understand. We tested a variety of ways to talk about local news, including different frames that highlight its value from various angles, and measured which ones inspired the most connection and action.

The good news is that **Americans still want and trust local news**. Our national survey found that:

## People Use Local News

- About two-thirds use local news to make everyday decisions (66%)
- Seven in ten say they are willing to pay for local news they trust (70%)

## People Value Local News

- Nine in ten believe local news is important for building strong communities (90%)
- Nearly nine in ten say local news should act as a watchdog (90%)
- Almost all agree that reliable local news is necessary for democracy (93%)



Press Forward's Christina Shih and journalist and consultant Mukhtar Ibrahim at the launch of Press Forward Minnesota. Photo courtesy of Press Forward Minnesota.

## People Trust Local News

- Nearly all support having independent local news in their communities (93%)
- More than eight in ten say they can easily find and access trustworthy local news and information (83%).
  - On the surface, this suggests Americans don't feel a shortage of access. But the perception doesn't match reality: even as newsrooms close and coverage shrinks, many assume they're still "covered" because they can get information somewhere, whether that's Facebook or a neighborhood newsletter. What people don't always see is the difference between depth and breadth, or between fact-checked reporting and unverified posts.
- Nearly three-quarters feel their local media is trustworthy (74%)— higher than their trust in national media

## People Want Solutions

- When told that the old way of funding news was not sufficient, nearly nine in ten said it was important to find new ways to fund local news (89%), with over half of them saying it was very important.
- Six in ten prefer coverage that includes proposed solutions (58%)
- About two-thirds prefer news that avoids pushing political viewpoints (68%)

Here's the point: Americans know local news matters. They want more of it. They're ready to back it. Our job is to help turn that readiness into action.

Mary Jo Jean-Francois, Dale Anglin, Nancy Van Milligen and Silvia Rivera celebrate Press Forward NE Iowa.



# Three Messages That Actually Work

Before we dive into strategy, here are three research-tested messages that consistently perform well across different audiences. **Use these as-is, or adapt them to fit your specific situation:**

## The Accountability Message

“Strong communities need someone keeping an eye on local institutions. Local news plays an important role in holding leaders accountable, keeping neighbors informed about important decisions, and ensuring transparency when it matters.”

**Why it works:** Focuses on accountability and transparency values that resonate across political divides. Positions local news as a community service, not a business.

## The Public Good Message

“Local news is a public good that keeps communities informed and connected. Like sidewalks and streetlights, local news is an essential resource for strong communities. It plays an important role in helping neighbors understand what’s happening and prepare to engage when it matters.”

**Why it works:** The sidewalks/streetlights comparison makes the concept concrete and relatable. Emphasizes collective benefit rather than individual consumption.

## The Civic Life Message

“Strong communities and strong local news go hand in hand. It’s how people learn about new policies, take part in local decisions, and stand up for what’s important to them.”

**Why it works:** Links local news to civic engagement without using polarizing language. Focuses on practical participation rather than abstract ideals

Pro tip: These messages work because they emphasize **what local news does for communities**, *not* what it is as an industry.

Now, let’s look at how you can customize and create messages that work for your community.

# How to Use This Toolkit:

## Getting Started:

This toolkit distills Press Forward's research into practical content your organization can use. You'll find sample messages linked to our research insights—but you know your community best. Treat these as adaptable guidelines to inspire your outreach, not rigid prescriptions. There are, however, a few notable exceptions:

### Pick the right words.

We recommend referring to the “use/avoid” list when drafting appeals, explainers, social posts, website copy, emails, or printed materials. We've added context where possible, but it's worth rethinking how—and whether—you use some familiar terms.

### Lean on the message frames.

A message frame is the lens through which you present information. It's not what you say, it's how you say it and what you emphasize. Think of it like photography. You can take a picture of the same building from different angles, with different lighting, focusing on different details. Each photo shows the same building, but each tells a different story. That's framing.

#### Example:

**Crisis Frame (not recommended):** “Local newsrooms are closing at an alarming rate.”

**Solutions Frame:** “Communities are finding innovative ways to support the local news they need.”

**Personal Relevance Frame:** “Local news helps you make better decisions about schools, safety, and your neighborhood.”

All three can be true at the same time, but each will move different people toward different actions. Our research shows that the most effective frames spark hope, not despair. People already trust local news, and most don't see it as “gone” — so our job is to build on that trust and invite them to imagine what's possible.



We tested multiple frames and spotlighted the top performers across audiences in this toolkit. Use them as a guide: start by identifying your audience, then apply the matching frame in your conversations and in your print and digital materials.

# Know Your Audience

## Quick Audience Guide

Audience	What They Care About	Best Frame to Use
General Public	Daily Usefulness	Personal relevance
Rural Communities	Local voices they know	Relational trust
Conservatives	Preserving tradition, safety	Solutions-oriented
Progressives	Accountability, action	Democracy-based
Young People (under 30)	Shareable, visual content	Personal relevance
Spanish Speakers	Family/community impact	Personal relevance
African Americans	Government accountability	Solutions-oriented

[Jump down to page 23](#) for a section on audience nuances.

## Message Frames and Insights: Choose Your Lens

These frames are based on how people evaluate and engage with local news. Each offers a different way to tell the story, depending on what will resonate most with your audience. Use them to shape messages, campaigns, and conversations that connect to people’s values and priorities.

## Personal Relevance Frame

*Local news helps you make choices every single day.*

### **What this frame is about:**

This frame treats local news and information as something people use every day to make decisions, such as which school to send their kids to, whether a new law affects them, how the local economy is performing, or how safe their neighborhood is. It focuses on real-life usefulness, such as information about where to eat and shop, rather than abstract civic ideas.

**Best for:** General public, potential subscribers, and people focused on everyday needs

### **How to use it:**

Use this when talking to people who aren't already tuned into civic engagement or media conversations. Emphasize how news helps them stay informed, make smart choices, and solve everyday problems.

**Key themes:** Personal benefit, daily usefulness, real-life impact, problem-solving

### **Sample message:**

“Local news helps people make decisions that matter, from updates about local schools to local elections or public safety.”

**Funders/ Policymakers:** *“Local news keeps communities informed on the issues that directly affect daily life - from public health to economic opportunity.”*

**Suburban:** *“Local news keeps you in the know about what's happening around you so you can make the choices that matter for your family.”*

**Conservatives/Right-Leaning:** *“Local news delivers facts you can use to make decisions that impact your home, work, and neighborhood.”*

**Progressives/Civic-Minded:** *“Local news connects people to the information they need to engage in their communities and shape their future.”*

**Rural Communities:** *“Local news covers the stories and events that matter in your town because no one knows your community like you do.”*

**Under 30:** *"Local news helps you find out what's happening now - from events to issues - so you can jump in when it counts."*

**Spanish-Speaking Communities:** *"Las noticias locales le brindan la información que necesita sobre su comunidad, en el idioma que entiende y confía."*

**Black/African American:** *"From school board policies to city budget priorities, local news gives you the information you need to stay informed and connected to your community."*

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## Relational Trust Frame

*You know the people behind your news.*

### **What this frame is about:**

In some communities, trust in information depends on knowing who's behind it. People want to hear from local voices they recognize, not faceless institutions. This frame highlights authenticity, local ownership, and connection.

**Best for:** Rural audiences and communities where trust comes from personal connection

### **How to use it:**

Use this when you're working in places where personal relationships matter more than big brands. Lean into messages about "by the community, for the community."

**Key themes:** Local voices, trust, authenticity, community connection

### **Sample message:**

"Local voices deserve local support. That's why we are defending access to community-rooted news and information, because people trust what comes from their neighbors."

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

**Funders/ Policymakers:** *"Local outlets have the trust and relationships needed to reach and serve their communities."*

**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."*

**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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## Solutions-Oriented Frame

*Shining a light on what's working, not just what's broken.*

### **What this frame is about:**

This frame focuses on how local news helps communities identify problems, work together, and take action. It's not about doom and gloom; it's about getting things done and making things better.

**Best for:** Conservative audiences or action-oriented audiences like policy advocates, civic groups, and community leaders

### **How to use it:**

Use this with people who want to make a difference: advocates, leaders, or anyone working on change. Position news as a tool that drives solutions, not just reports on problems.

**Key themes:** Collaboration, progress, civic action, community problem-solving



**Sample message:**

“It’s not just news. It’s how neighbors come together, solve problems, and move forward. Local news shines a light on the decisions that affect us all.”

**General Public:** “Local news shows how people are solving problems and improving life in your community.”

**Funders/Polymakers:** “Local news identifies solutions and success stories that can be scaled to strengthen more communities.”

**Conservatives/Right-Leaning:** “Local news focuses on results, spotlighting what’s working, holding institutions accountable, and where and how people are getting things done.”

**Progressives/Civic-Minded:** “Local news elevates community-led solutions that drive lasting change.”

**Rural Communities:** “Local news shares how neighbors are stepping up and making your town a better place.”

**Under 30:** “Local news spotlights real people taking action and making change happen.”

**Spanish-Speaking Communities:** “Las noticias locales muestran historias de personas y soluciones que fortalecen a nuestras comunidades.”

**Black/African American:** “Local news highlights the people and organizations in your community who are making real change happen and shows you how you can make your voice heard.”

Jean Hakuzimana interviews Titi de Baccarat for Amjambo Africa, a Press Forward grantee.  
Credit: Mark Mattos



## Accountability Frame

*Someone needs to keep an eye on local institutions.*

### **What this frame is about:**

This frame highlights the watchdog role of local news, making sure leaders, agencies, and institutions are working in the public's best interest. It underscores transparency, oversight, and the need for independent, fact-based reporting that holds power to account.

**Best for:** Civic-minded audiences, progressives, African American communities, funders, and policymakers

### **How to use it:**

Use this when speaking to audiences who value fairness, transparency, and ethical governance. Avoid partisan framing; focus on the shared benefit of having an independent source that keeps local decision-makers honest and accountable.

**Key themes:** Oversight, transparency, fairness, protecting the public interest

### **Core message (general use):**

“Local news ensures that city councils, school boards, and local businesses are serving the community’s interests.”

### **Audience variations:**

**General Public:** *“Local news makes sure your tax dollars are spent wisely and your leaders are working for you.”*

**Funders/Policymakers:** *“Local news provides the oversight that keeps public institutions transparent and accountable.”*

**Conservatives/Right-Leaning:** *“Local news keeps watch over government and institutions so that leaders stay in check.”*

**Progressives/Civic-Minded:** *“Local news protects the public interest by holding leaders and institutions accountable.”*

**Rural Communities:** *“Local news keeps an eye on what’s happening at your school board, town council, and local businesses.”*

**Under 30:** *"Local news helps you see what's really going on and holds people in power accountable."*

**Spanish-Speaking Communities:** *"Las noticias locales vigilan a las instituciones para asegurar que sirvan a la comunidad."*

**Black/African American:** *"Local news ensures city councils, school boards, police departments, and local agencies are transparent about their decisions and accountable to the community they serve."*

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## Crisis Response Frame

*When there's a crisis, local news is the lifeline.*

### **What this frame is about:**

This frame shows how local news is critical during a crisis, whether that's a flood, wildfire, pandemic, or political upheaval. When things go wrong, people need timely, accurate, local information.

**Best for:** Urgent campaigns, emergency situations, or when a local news organization is fielding an emergency

### **How to use it:**

Use this for regions prone to crisis or to underscore where there is value in focusing on the consequences of losing local news as a resource.

**Key themes:** Urgency, protection, essential service, public safety

### **Sample message:**

"You can't address what you don't know about. Local news helps communities prepare, respond, and stay safe in times of crisis."

**General Public:** *"When something happens, local news tells you what's going on and how to stay safe."*

**Funders/Polymakers:** *"Local news provides life-saving information during emergencies — a public service that requires sustained support."*

**Conservatives/Right-Leaning:** *"When disaster strikes, local news is on the ground making sure you have the facts you need."*

**Progressives/Civic-Minded:** *"In moments of crisis, local news unites communities with the information they need to respond."*

**Rural Communities:** *"When storms hit or roads close, local news is the first to tell you what you need to know."*

**Under 30:** *"In a crisis, local news gets you the updates you need — fast and where you'll see them."*

**Spanish-Speaking Communities:** *"En una crisis, las noticias locales le informan rápidamente para mantener a salvo a su familia."*

**Black/African American:** *"When emergencies happen, local news provides the reliable information your family needs to stay safe."*

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## Source Credibility Frame

*Stronger local news means a stronger community.*

### What this frame is about:

Some places already have trusted local news. This frame reinforces that trust and reminds people that these outlets are worth preserving. It emphasizes consistency, reliability, and the value of local institutions.

**Best for:** Communities that already have strong local outlets or consistent news readers

### How to use it:

Use this in areas with established media or long-time readers. The goal is to protect what works and build pride in local news that's already doing its job.

**Key themes:** Trust, consistency, dependability, community value



## Sample message:

### “Strong communities need strong local news.”

**General Public:** *“Our community is stronger because we have local news we can count on.”*

**Funders/ Policymakers:** *“Trusted local news is a cornerstone of healthy, resilient communities.”*

**Conservatives/Right-Leaning:** *“Strong local news means you can depend on the facts from people who live in your community.”*

**Progressives/Civic-Minded:** *“Local news strengthens our civic life by keeping people connected and informed.”*

**Rural Communities:** *“In towns like ours, trusted local news is part of what holds the community together.”*

**Under 30:** *“Local news you can trust keeps your community connected and informed.”*

**Spanish-Speaking Communities:** *“Las noticias locales de confianza fortalecen a nuestra comunidad.”*

**Black/African American:** *“Local news strengthens our community by keeping us connected to our neighbors and informed about what’s happening.”*

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## Objectivity Frame

*You deserve news that respects your ability to make up your own mind.*

### What this frame is about:

This frame is about fairness and neutrality. It speaks to people who don’t want to be told what to think. They want facts, not spin, and they value independence in media.

**Best for:** Mixed political audiences, skeptics, and anyone concerned about bias

## How to use it:

Use this when talking to politically diverse or skeptical audiences. Focus on how local news respects their intelligence by giving them the tools to decide for themselves.

**Key themes:** Neutrality, independence, fairness, respect for the audience

## Sample message:

“Local news gives you the information you need to make up your own mind.”

**General Public:** *“Local news gives you the full story, without telling you what to think.”*

**Funders/ Policymakers:** *“Local news strengthens communities by providing independent, fact-based reporting.”*

**Conservatives/Right-Leaning:** *“Local news delivers facts without the spin, so you can decide for yourself.”*

**Progressives/Civic-Minded:** *“Local news values fairness and independence, giving communities the tools to think critically.”*

**Rural Communities:** *“Local news respects your judgment — it gives you the information and lets you decide.”*

**Spanish-Speaking Communities:** *“Las noticias locales le ofrecen información imparcial para que usted forme su propia opinión.”*

**Black/African American:** *“Local news gives you the facts you need to make up your own mind about what’s happening in your community.”*



Jeff Lee, owner of Seoul Jangteo, a Press Forward grantee, with copies of The Boston Korea newspaper. Credit: Jonathan Wiggs/ Globe Staff

## Democracy-Based Frame

*Local news is a cornerstone for a healthy democracy.*

### **What this frame is about:**

This frame puts the connection between healthy local news and information systems at the forefront of the conversation. It draws the connection between these resources and the viability of democracy.

### **When to use it:**

Democracy and civic-engagement focused organizations, funders, NOT the general public

### **How to use it:**

Use this with funders, thought leaders, and decision makers. This frame is not meant to be used with the general public, but can be leaned on with organizations that are already aware of the connection between news and democracy.

**Key themes:** Civic action, engagement, taking action, democratic mobilization

### **Sample messages:**

“When local news disappears, so does local accountability. We invest in information solutions that strengthen democratic participation.”

**Funders/ Policymakers:** *“Healthy democracies depend on strong local news — it’s how communities stay informed, engaged, and represented.”*

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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
- Reliable



A workshop at the Lexington Market produced by Press Forward grantee The Baltimore Beat in partnership with the Baltimore Museum of Art. Photo by Myles Michelin.

## Special Considerations

**Why We Avoid Using the Words “Journalism” and “Media”** - While 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.

**Why We Avoid “Democracy” For Many Audiences** - 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 strategic solution for most funders is simple: don’t avoid the concept, avoid the word.



Lead with concrete benefits people already value, let audiences make the democracy connection themselves. However, if you're speaking with funders whose core mission explicitly includes democracy or democratic institutions, then "democracy" language may resonate strongly. Instead of saying "local news protects democracy" to most audiences, try "local news keeps you informed about decisions affecting your taxes, schools, and safety."

**Why This Language Matters:** Terminology can make or break audience engagement. Words like "community" and "service" unite people across political divides, while industry terms can create barriers to understanding and support.

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## Words to avoid

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

- Journalism
- Journalist
- Trustworthy (without proof)
- 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

## 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 community news
  - Unbiased local information
  - Trustworthy news
  - Trustworthy local information
  - Local news as a **civic utility** (like roads or schools)
  - News as a **community connector** and **accountability tool**.
  - Emphasis on **practical outcomes** — safety, accountability, participation
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## Phrases to avoid

The following phrases resonated poorly across all demographics, for various reasons. 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

## Talking points related to local news and information

This section offers ready-to-use talking points that highlight messages our research shows resonate best with key audiences. Whether you're speaking at an event, meeting with a partner, or crafting a post, these messages are designed to build support for local news by emphasizing its value and importance.

- **Unbiased, trustworthy local news is an essential component of strong communities.** People rely on local news outlets to deliver accurate, fair information that enables decisions that impact their lives, such as school board decisions or emergency response situations.
- **Local news is a public good that connects communities.** Like sidewalks and streetlights, local news is essential infrastructure that helps neighbors understand what's happening and prepare to engage when it matters.
- **Strong communities and strong local news go hand in hand.** Local news is how people learn about new policies, take part in local decisions, and stand up for what's important to them.
- **When communities are informed, they are stronger and more connected.** Access to local news helps people participate in civic life, connect with their neighbors, and solve challenges in the community.
- **Supporting local news is supporting your community.** Whether through subscriptions, engagement, or advocacy, investing in local news ensures that trustworthy, unbiased information remains available to everyone.

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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.

#### **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.



Photo courtesy of Press Forward

## ***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."

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## **Tough Questions and Responses**

Even the most compelling messages can face skepticism or pushback, especially when discussing complex issues like media trust, funding, or the future of local news.

Here are some questions that donors may ask, particularly to those who are fundraising. These answers equip you with clear, values-based responses to frequently asked questions and tough conversations.

**Why should I care about local news?** Local news helps you make decisions that matter every single day. From school board policies to road construction to local elections, you need reliable information about what's happening in your community. National news can't tell you which route to take during a storm or how your city council voted on that new development.

**Who should fund local news?** Everyone benefits when communities have strong local news, and there are things you can do to help. This includes individual subscriptions, local business advertising, community donations, and promoting policies that support local news. The goal is to create a diverse support system where businesses, residents, and organizations all support the gathering and sharing of news and information that fosters community involvement.

**Shouldn't local news be free?** Local news should be easily accessible to everyone, but newsrooms need financial support in order to survive. A diversified approach to funding local news can help ease the burden on news consumers.

**Can't I just get my news from social media?** Many people turn to social media for local information, sometimes that includes reporting directly from journalists and local outlets, and sometimes it comes from less reliable sources. Social media doesn't create the news; it's a channel where information is exchanged and shared. The distinction matters: professional local newsrooms are the ones verifying facts, providing context, and holding leaders accountable. While social platforms are useful for exchanging information and accessing that reporting, communities still need the people who attend public meetings, investigate problems, and ask tough questions on their behalf.

**What if I don't trust the media? Isn't local news biased, too?** Local news is different because it is rooted in the community it serves. The people covering local news live alongside their readers and viewers. They shop at the same stores, attend the same events, and know that if they get something wrong, they will hear about it directly. That close connection creates strong incentives to be fair, accurate, and accountable. Local trust is earned through consistent reporting on the issues that shape daily life.

**How is local news different from national news?** National news often covers big-picture stories and issues of national politics, policy, and culture. Local news complements that by focusing on the information residents need in daily life like traffic, weather, schools, and local elections. Together, both perspectives help people understand the world around them at every level.

**Why should I pay for local news when so much news is free online?** Local news requires people on the ground: reporters who live in your area, attend city council meetings, and track local issues. That work costs money. The traditional business model that once funded local coverage has eroded. Many advertisers have moved to online platforms, and often businesses now market directly to consumers. As a result, the responsibility for sustaining local news is shifting. Readers, listeners,

community foundations, and local businesses all play a role in covering the expense of gathering and sharing information. Supporting local news today is more like supporting a cause you believe in. Without it, communities lose cohesion and public officials lose accountability.

**How do I know if my local news is doing a good job?** Good local news helps you make sense of your own community. It should answer the questions that affect your daily life: Why are your taxes going up? Why was the trash not picked up this week? What is that new construction project down the street?

It should keep you informed about your schools, including how children are performing, whether too much time is being spent on testing, and whether students are being prepared for real life, higher education, or work. It should prepare you for emergencies by telling you where to go for shelter, how to get help, and what resources are available when disaster strikes.

Strong local news also covers your health and wellbeing. It lets you know if your hospital is overcrowded, whether there are enough doctors in your community, or how to sign up for health insurance. And it connects you to the heartbeat of your town or city, from churches and libraries to restaurants, community groups, and cultural events.

At its best, local news does more than relay facts. It investigates problems, explains why they matter, and highlights possible solutions. It reflects the diversity of voices in your community and gives you the context to make informed decisions about your own life. If your news source is doing all of that, it is serving you well.



Co-sports editors Emily Maciel and Joel Carpio interview Cerritos College football wide receiver Dillon Laurer for the weekly podcast of the Talon Marks, a Press Forward grantee.  
Photo by Ryan Sumida

