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This document contains copy-and-paste language. Read more here about why these strategies matter.

Explain how your journalism is funded

Without the transactional nature of other industries (we give you a product, you give us money), it makes sense that people don't really consider the need to pay for news. But that situation has led to a perception that journalism is — and should be — free. And a collapsing economy is endangering news businesses even while news consumption is high and people need journalism desperately. It's time to lay out for your community how you make money, why you need their support (if applicable) and how funding does or does not influence your coverage.

Feel free to borrow this language and adapt it for your own use. This language can be added to stories as editor's notes or shaded/pull-out boxes, inside stories on-air, published in social posts and more. The language can and should be edited to reflect your newsroom values. If you do borrow or adapt any language below, please send a link of what you publish to info@trustingnews.org so we can see it in action. Find examples of newsrooms talking about their funding on our website.

Explain your funding

SAMPLE LANGUAGE FOR SUBSCRIPTION MODELS: In general, about two thirds of our revenue comes from advertising and about one third from subscriptions. We charge advertisers for the ability to reach and engage with our audiences. Advertisers pay based on how many people their ads will reach and also how many people click on their ads. They want engaged users, not just a lot of eyeballs. Right now, more people than usual are turning to us for news. But when local businesses suffer, they often spend less on marketing and promotions. The cancellation of just one big ad contract could cost us thousands of dollars a month. Our news organization's finances typically reflect the state of the local economy. The bottom line is that a surge in online traffic to our website is not likely to offset the decline in advertising revenue. That brings us to the other one third of our income: subscriptions. For us to continue to serve you during this tough economy, we will rely more than ever on your financial support. If your budget allows for it, please subscribe.

SAMPLE LANGUAGE FOR COMMERCIAL TV: The vast majority of our revenue comes from advertising — xx% on air and xx% online. As news outlets have since the beginning of commercial media, we charge advertisers for the ability to reach our audiences. It would take a dramatic shift in our broadcast ratings to make a real difference in our overall revenue. In addition, local advertising is extremely dependent on the local economy. When local businesses suffer, they often spend less money on marketing and promotions. When community members

spend less on goods and services — because they have less to spend or because of a much larger disruption like coronavirus — businesses cancel their advertising budgets. The cancellation of just one big ad contract could cost us thousands of dollars a month. A surge in online traffic to our website or in TV viewership is not likely to offset the decline in advertising revenue. Our news organization's finances typically reflect the state of the local economy.

SAMPLE LANGUAGE FOR DONATION OR MEMBERSHIP MODELS: In general, about xx% of our revenue comes from advertising and about xx% from donations/membership. We charge advertisers for the ability to reach and engage with our audiences. Right now, more people than usual are turning to us for news. But local advertising is extremely dependent on the local economy, and the cancellation of just one big ad contract could cost us thousands of dollars a month. A surge in online readership of our website is not likely to offset the decline in advertising revenue, which means we are more reliant than ever on your financial support. We will need to increase our donation/membership revenue to continue serving you during this tough economy. If your budget allows for it, please sustain or increase your contribution.

Money & coverage decisions

We know some of you are concerned that news outlets intentionally sensationalize the news or stoke fear, and we want to address directly any worry that that's the case for us. We do pay close attention to what news stories you seem to find most valuable. If a certain topic or type of story routinely gets more readership (or viewership) than others, we're likely to spend our staff energy doing more of that type of work. We value your feedback, and our business model depends on our ability to provide coverage that is consistently interesting, useful and valuable. We will be in better shape financially if we offer more of what you find useful and less of what you don't want. One way that we gauge your interest in something is by paying attention to our online "traffic" — to which stories get clicked on and shared the most. That's true on regular days, and it's definitely true during big news events, when we want to be somewhere you turn to to stay informed and make sense of what's going on. However, it would take significant spikes in advertising (or ratings) to influence our overall revenue (spikes our collapsing economy is not likely to produce anytime soon). And in this newsroom, revenue considerations simply do not take priority over meaningful public service.

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Invest in engagement

How can journalism be a catalyst for and host of community conversation? How can that conversation — happening entirely online these days — be a constructive force? How do journalists know what their communities need from them — and what they really think of them? While answering those questions looks different in different newsrooms, doing so is as important now as it's ever been. We know you're busy, and this is worth prioritizing. It's arguably never been more important to understand what your audience thinks of you, have a grasp of what information they need, and be seen as a valuable resource. That's the relationship you want with the people you aim to serve, right?

Feel free to borrow the language in this doc and adapt it for your own use. (And find more examples of newsroom engagement on our website). If you do, please send a link to what you publish to info@trustingnews.org so we can see it in action. Here are some key ways newsrooms should invest in meaningful online engagement right now.

Take ownership over the conversations you host, just as you would at an in-person party. Imagine that you decide to have people over. You stock the bar, put on some music and throw open the door. And then you ... leave. You hope (assume?) people will be on their best behavior, and you expect to come home to a house that's still in order. Ridiculous, right? We count on an event's host to connect people, to gently redirect someone who gets a bit unruly, and to call that person a cab if necessary. This is true in comments as well. Journalists can validate good behavior, contribute to conversations and reprimand people who are ruining the vibe.

Have a comment policy you can link to. Use it on social platforms and on your website. Then look for chances to draw attention to it. Say something like:

> *"We know you value civility, and we do too. That's why our comment policy sets some ground rules (include a link). We've banned a few commenters who were making personal attacks, and we'll continue to keep an eye on things. Thanks to everyone who's contributing to productive and respectful conversations."*

Read comments and respond. Click like on productive comments. Thank people for their feedback. Answer questions. We know you are tight on time, but at least pick some high-profile stories to focus on, where interest is high. Remember that when you respond, you're answering not just the commenter but also everyone else who's reading. Do you want those people to scroll past an accusation about your work and not find an accompanying rebuttal? Don't let your detractors have open season on your credibility. And don't let earnest, curious community members go unanswered when they inquire about your ethics and processes.

Increase the efficiency of your responses. Start a newsroom doc where you collect language you use to respond to your community. This can start with comments, but also think about the emails, phone conversations and in-person interactions. If a journalist has already written a paragraph explaining how she fact-checked a story or how advertising dollars don't influence news coverage, repurpose that. Turn it into a Facebook post or an Instagram story. Put it in a newsletter. Put it in a box alongside a related story. The language can be simple:

> *"We know readers are curious about xxx. Here's how that works." Or, if you have permission: "Reader Ben Jones gave us permission to share this question he asked us, along with our answer to his email. Submit your question at xxx."*

Bring feedback back to the newsroom. What does your audience think of you? What questions do they have about your work? Set up a simple system to collect and share the most common themes. Maybe it's a Slack channel, or a few minutes during a weekly meeting.

Share the duty. Try not to make this the job of one social producer. Pass the baton around. But it's probably best if only people who actually *like* other people moderate comments. Don't put the staffers who tend toward crankiness and defensiveness in charge of your brand's response.

Be mindful of tone. It can take a deft touch to take a cranky and/or uninformed commenter and respond in a way that is neither condescending nor defensive but instead takes the high road and assumes a genuine desire. See examples from Mike Canan at WCPO.

Turn complaints into opportunities to earn trust. Think about negative comments as opportunities to provide information about how journalism operates. Example:

> COMPLAINT: You're only writing about this business because you're out to get them!
> INFORMATION GAP: Why do journalists find it important to write stories that are critical of local businesses?
> RESPONSE: The health department has found repeated violations at this restaurant that are a matter of public safety. As journalists, one of our jobs is to alert the community to how their government is functioning and also to share information that helps keep people safe. We will be sure to also share when these violations are cleared up. Thanks for commenting.

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Explain your purpose

There are a lot of accusations and attacks on news organizations and their approach to covering COVID-19. Journalists are being accused of being sensational, of enjoying and benefiting from reporting on the crisis and in some cases making all of it up. We could ignore the accusations and pretend they are not happening. The problem with that, though, is then the comments and misassumptions are out there for anyone to read and believe because we did not set the record straight. If we do not explain our approach to covering this pandemic, no one else will.

Does your audience **know** about your goals for coverage of this huge, global story? Or, like so much of journalism's internal deliberations, is your mission invisible to outsiders (you know, like the people you aim to serve). Feel free to borrow this language and adapt it for your own use. If you do, please send a link to what you publish to info@trustingnews.org so we can see it in action. Find examples of newsrooms explaining their purpose on our website.

Explain “bad news” coverage

We understand that watching and hearing the news right now may be scary or cause you to feel anxious. We feel that way, too. And we want you to know that our goal is not to cause fear or anxiety but instead provide you with the information you need to keep your family safe. That’s why we will be focusing on stories that provide you the facts of what’s happening in our community. We promise to focus on information that is helpful and not exaggerated or sensationalized. We also want to hear what questions you have. Let us know what’s on your mind by contacting us at xxxx. While a lot of our coverage is focused on the pandemic, we are making an effort to also highlight inspirational stories that are happening throughout our community as well. So many people are stepping up to help, and we want to bring you those stories as well. Each day we will highlight these stories in a newsletter, on-air, etc.

Explain volume of coverage

COVID-19 is impacting every aspect of daily life in so many ways. Because one of our main goals as a news organization is to keep you informed, you will notice a lot of our coverage will be related to this global pandemic. You will also notice a lot of new and changing information as we report on the number of cases, hospitalizations, deaths and recoveries, closures around the community and health and safety recommendations. Because of all of this you may notice more stories and live coverage being produced. We feel it is necessary to produce all of these stories

and provide you with updates so we can fulfill our role of providing you the information you need to make safe and smart decisions. On social media we will try to limit COVID-19 coverage to a few threads, and online we are working to make sure publication dates are easily visible and stories are updated with the most accurate up-to-date information we have. If you're feeling overwhelmed, consider subscribing to our daily newsletter. Each morning, we'll make sure you know the top news of the day. Then feel free to limit your other news coverage if that works best for you.

Your community commitment

At XX newsroom we are working to keep you informed so you can keep your family safe. While how we are gathering information has changed and we are not always working side-by-side due to social distancing and health and safety recommendations, we are still abiding by the same ethics and news values that have allowed us to serve xxxx for xxxx years. Like you, we are adjusting to this "new normal," and we want you to know, we are here for you through it all. If you have questions or just want to share where toilet paper is available, contact us here xxxx.

Explain your priorities

Through this global pandemic, we are making a commitment to serve this community. Our goal is to provide you with the latest information as we receive it and verify it. Because this story is impacting every aspect of life as we know it, there is so much to cover each day. We know we cannot cover it all and have made it a priority to focus on these things:

- Health and safety information (including the latest number of cases, how to best protect yourself and the latest safety recommendations)
- Closure announcements
- Assistance resources available (food banks, unemployment, etc.)
- Local impact to businesses, communities and health care workers
- Resources for how you can help
- Advice and best practices to stay well
- Answering your questions

Because we cannot cover everything and have a limited staff, you may see reporters and editors stepping outside of their usual coverage focuses (like sports, weather, music) to cover COVID-19. You may also see less of some content or changes to your favorite section. We promise to explain these changes as they come and let you into our reporting process as much as possible. If you have questions or ideas, contact us here xxx.

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Demonstrate your credibility

Journalists care deeply about being accurate and checking facts when producing news content. We work to be ethical. But many news consumers don't know that—and we don't often communicate it clearly. So, while fact-checking and being accurate are part of every aspect of what we do, if we do not share that information with the public, they may assume it is not happening.

Does your audience **know** about how you work to be fair and ethical? What are your standards for using information from sources? Feel free to borrow this language and adapt it for your own use. If you do, please send a link to what you publish to info@trustingnews.org so we can see it in action. Find examples of newsrooms explaining their ethics on our website.

Where you get information

We have a commitment to providing you with the most accurate and up-to-date information available. For us that means constantly monitoring local, regional and national government updates, reaching out to hospitals and verifying information before publishing it. We rely on information coming from you and other sources, and we don't publish data or information until we can verify it's true and have the ability to add context to it. Because information can change quickly during big news events, we are especially careful to point to only the most reputable sources. And if something we've shared later turns out to be wrong, we'll move quickly to correct it.

How you choose experts

We rely on government leaders to provide accurate information. If they provide facts or data, we will use that in our reporting. On top of government leaders, we will turn to industry experts as well. While covering COVID-19 these people will include doctors, nurses, scientists and public health experts. Before publishing their thoughts or airing their information, we verify their expertise and work to see how what they are saying compares to what others in their field are saying. If someone is providing an opinion, we will make sure it is clearly labeled as such and will work to get varying opinions on issues.

How you handle corrections

Our goal is to always provide accurate information. If we learn that information we provided is incorrect we will publicly correct the mistake, as any reputable news organization should. When

correcting the mistake we will update the original stories and in some cases will also produce brand news stories so the correct information is readily available. If a story has been corrected it will be labeled as such. If you believe a story needs to be corrected, you can contact us here xxx.

Misinformation

We know searching for information online can be confusing, and you'll find a lot of things that feel fishy or just plain wrong. That's why we want you to know we are here to help. If you have a question about something you are hearing or reading, please feel free to reach out to us about it and we will try to point you in the right direction. We also will not tolerate misinformation being shared on our platforms or social media spaces. If we see stories, links or information being shared that seems to spread misinformation or present things as fact that are not, we will delete them. If you have questions about things you are seeing in your neighborhood or hearing elsewhere, please feel free to send that information to us here xxx and we would be glad to check that out for you.